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# The Parent-School Partnership: Exploring the Role, Needs, and Barriers of Parent Participation

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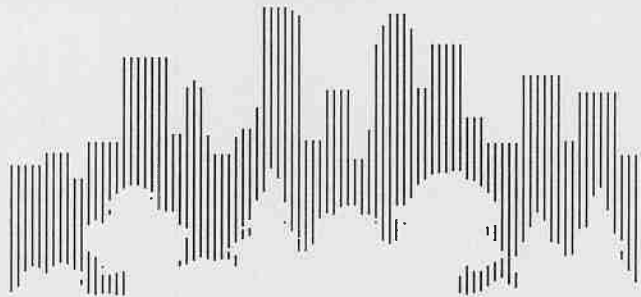
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## MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS

Bethany J. Jarvis

**The Parent-School Partnership:  
Exploring the Role, Needs, and  
Barriers of Parent Participation**

1999

**MSW  
Thesis**

Thesis  
Jarvis

**THE PARENT-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP:  
EXPLORING THE ROLE, NEEDS, AND BARRIERS  
OF PARENT PARTICIPATION**

**Bethany J. Jarvis**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirement for the degree of  
Master of Social Work**

**AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA**

**1999**

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK  
AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of:

Bethany J. Jarvis

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Social Work Degree.

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To my beautiful little angel, Luke...and  
to my family and friends who put up with me,  
supported me, and most of all loved me.

A special thanks to Dr. Sharon Patten, Denise Steinberg,  
and Cambridge Elementary...for your guidance  
and your knowledge.

## **ABSTRACT OF THESIS**

### **The Parent-School Partnership: Exploring the Role, Needs, and Barriers of Parent Participation**

#### **Methodology: An Exploratory Study and Parent Needs Assessment**

**Bethany J. Jarvis  
June 1999**

The research reveals that a positive and active partnership between schools and parents is essential in successful learning and student achievement. Despite the comprehensive research in this area, educational practitioners remain ambivalent about parental involvement in schools, and parent participation is weak in many schools even when parents are invited. An exploratory study which addressed the role, needs, and barriers of parent participation was conducted using surveys to parents who have a child or children enrolled at Cambridge Elementary School. Cambridge Elementary School is located approximately 60 miles north of the Twin Cities Metro Area, and has close to 890 students enrolled in the Kindergarten through fourth grade school. The data collected assessed the level of parent-school partnership at Cambridge Elementary and found that both parents and teachers are working to foster the parent-school partnership by engaging in activities that enhance a more active working relationship. The majority of the parent participants conveyed a positive view of the school, its teachers, and their experience within this educational environment. This study provided a basis for implementing change by developing goals and strategies for how a community, school, and family, can facilitate a positive parent-school partnership. Social workers often bring families and schools together in providing adequate information for problem-solving, or in providing appropriate services for children and families. Recognizing and understanding the needs of parents is a significant tool in creating a positive relationship and in building a successful future for families and school.

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## INTRODUCTION

**“Parents are the essential link in improving American education, and schools simply have to do a better job of reaching out to them. Sending a report card home is not enough...” Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Education**

### Overview

It is well documented that when families, teachers, schools, and communities work together in a constructive partnership, schools get better, and students experience more success and achievement. Home-school partnerships are now broadly accredited as desirable and even essential to effective schooling (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Powell, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Binford & Newell, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Chavkin & Williams, 1989). Education is not just about something one has to do. Education is about discovering the distinct skills and talents of individuals; and helping to guide their growth and learning in relationship with integrity and high standards.

The current research reveals that an active parent-school partnership reaps benefits in several venues (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Binford & Newell, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Chavkin & Williams, 1989). Teachers feel empowered and supported by actively involved parents; and also become more comfortable in discussing a child's educational progress with parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). Parents feel more confident in being able to help their child achieve academic success, and demonstrate a more supportive and comfortable relationship with their child's teacher (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Powell, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). Children receive support from their parents, have a more positive outlook regarding their learning, and achieve more success (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989).

In establishing effective home-school partnerships, there are several types of involvement both parents and teachers can take in pursuing this working relationship for the benefit of a child's total growth and development (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991). A parent or teacher can pursue the role of participating in the basic obligations of educational involvement through a more active role in engaging in the partnership, or through an advocacy role in the decision-making process of the school. The home-school partnership includes the nature and frequency of contacts between parents and teacher, as well as a consistent and similar exchange of values and experiences from the adults to the children (Bowen, 1999).

Many parents prepare their children well for their school experience, instilling positive values and healthy attitudes about school and learning. However, there are many parents who want to help their children to learn more, who struggle with this, but do not come to the school in search of this guidance. This does not mean that these parents do not care about their children or about their children's education. Job and family demands leave minimal free time for parents to become involved in the school and in their child's education (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). So what can schools do for parents? There are important steps schools can take in facilitating this partnership with parents and families that involve developing policies and procedures which define clearly defined roles for parents and schools; as well as taking an active role in guiding positive teacher practices and values. Despite the abundance of research supporting the parent-school partnership, a significant number of educational practitioners remain ambivalent about the home-school partnership (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991).

Survey research shows that many parents want guidance from schools on how to help their children reach their educational potential. For this reason, parents look to schools for help even when they have not made the initial contact with the schools, or even when they are not comfortable in this exchange. Schools have the responsibility to facilitate this

first step with parents. This first step means making parents feel welcome in the school (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

### **Purpose of Study**

As the literature has documented and emphasized, there is a tremendous link between the parent-school partnership, and the success of student achievement in school, as well as parent success in providing for the educational needs of their children (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Powell, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Binford & Newell, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Berger 1991). Necessary changes must take place in school practices to accommodate the multifaceted changes that have taken place in families, communities, roles, and structures; and to help foster the parent-school partnership in renewing the social capital that has been lost in the shuffle.

Through the use of a parent survey, this research study will help to provide a basis for identifying the role that parents and teachers take in fostering the parent-school partnership. Specifically, this research study addresses the following questions:

- What role are parents taking in fostering the parent-school partnership?
- How do teachers involve parents in a child's education.
- In what ways would parents like teachers to involve them that the teacher is not currently doing?
- Are there any barriers that prevent parents from actively fostering the parent-school partnership?

### **Goals of Research**

It is the goal of this researcher that the information gathered from the parent surveys provide a basis of identifying the role, needs, and barriers, of parent participation. A potential result of this study may be a better understanding of the parent-school partnership; as well as the entities of this working relationship and the benefits for children

and families. The data can provide a basis for implementing change by developing goals and strategies on how a community, school, and family, can encourage and facilitate a positive parent-school partnership. As a parent, educator, or community member, this information can help foster this change, which is the responsibility of all us. Recognizing and understanding the needs of parents and teachers is a significant tool in creating a positive relationship and building a successful future for families and schools.

# **THE PARENT-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP: EXPLORING THE ROLE, NEEDS, AND BARRIERS, OF PARENT PARTICIPATION**

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

A universal need of parents is to have adequate and up-to-date information regarding their child's education, progress and development, and program options if applicable (Brantlinger, 1991). Successful family coping is related to the availability of, and access to, high-quality resources (Brantlinger, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1994). Home-school partnerships are now broadly accredited as desirable and even essential to effective schooling (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Powell, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991, Binford & Newell, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Chavkin & Williams, 1989). Researchers who have sought to find the answers to student success or failure, have focused on either the home or the school, but have not looked at the relationship between these two entities and how this partnership plays a key role in the success or failure of student achievement. Now, however, it is increasingly acknowledged that these two entities, the school and the family, share responsibility for student success and achievement (Bowen, 1999). This current research reveals that an active parent-school partnership reaps benefits in several venues (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Binford & Newell, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Chavkin & Williams, 1989). For example, teachers feel empowered and supported by actively involved parents; and also become more comfortable in discussing a child's educational progress with parents who are supportive of both the teacher and their child (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). Another documented benefit is that parents feel more confident in being



able to help their child achieve academic success, and demonstrate a more supportive and comfortable relationship with their child's teacher (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Powell, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). Parents can contribute insights and knowledge that complement the professional skills of school staff, and help strengthen academic and social programs (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). Children as well receive advantages through a healthy parent-teacher partnership. Children receive support from their parents, have a more positive outlook regarding their learning, and achieve more success. (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). So how do schools engage parents and families in an educational partnership? What role are parents taking in fostering the parent-school partnership? How do teachers involve parents in a child's education; and in what ways would parents like teachers to involve them in their child's education? Are there any barriers that prevent parents from actively fostering the parent-school partnership? These questions have been explored at the Cambridge Elementary School, which serves children and families in grade Kindergarten through Fourth Grade. The goal is to provide a basis for improving the parent-school partnerships, work to maintain existing success, and provide the basis for goal achievement in responding to the needs of families and the needs of the school.

The following hypotheses will be examined in the review of literature: (1) positive parent-school partnerships provide optimal achievement for students and successful opportunities in a child's learning; (2) these partnerships promote a more supportive and comfortable relationship between the school and families; (3) teachers are supportive of parent/guardian participation, however, at the same time teachers are also apprehensive in communicating with parents about student difficulties, needs, and concerns; (4) that parents often feel intimidated by the school, and often feel as though they are under the

parenting microscope; and (5) that regardless of these parent-school partnerships, and programs provided to parents by the school, there still remains a division between parents and/or guardians and the school. The review of literature also explores the following concepts: what is a parent-school partnership? what do parents expect from schools, and vice versa? how does each party view the other? what does a parent-school partnership have to offer students, families, and schools? what is needed for a successful parent-school partnership? and how is this partnership achieved?

### **The History Factor**

After World War II, the technological and scientific changes that took place also brought about significant social changes, including the relationship between the home and the school. Because of geographic distances in the triangle of parent-teacher-school, and the media which visually transfers attitudes, customs and values opposite of that which teachers and parents try to encourage; these changes decrease the level of trust and agreement that can exist between the home and the school (Comer, 1986).

The response of the different systems within our society, including schools, government, and other agencies, to these technological and scientific changes has been a primary impediment to meaningful parent participation in school. The approach has been to increase training and achievement requirements for teachers and students. What has not been given as abundant attention is how to create a context for effective teaching and learning.

### **Levels and Types of Parent-School Involvement**

Despite the abundance of research supporting the parent-school partnership, a significant number of educational practitioners are ambivalent about parental involvement in schools. Parent participation, as well, is weak in many schools even when parents are invited (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991). This is due in part to the

rationale that such involvement is not rooted in child development, relationship building, and systems theory (Comer & Haynes, 1991). As a result, the issues that do interfere with successful parental involvement and staff interaction are not addressed, and the experience is adequate for neither staff nor parents.

In establishing effective home-school partnerships, there are several types of involvement demonstrated and actively pursued by parents and schools (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991). These types and levels of involvement should be a part of a contextually focused school improvement process designed to create positive relationships that support children's total development and growth (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Hobbs et al., 1984; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Binford & Newell, 1991). These types of involvement should also be based on supportive and responsive interaction from teacher to parent (Brantlinger, 1991). The home-school partnership includes the nature and frequency of contacts between adults in the home and at school, as well as the similarity or consistency between values and experiences encountered by children in the two settings (Bowen, 1999). Schools have obvious responsibilities in terms of the home-school component, and they can take leadership in promoting shared knowledge and outlooks about children and educational success (Bowen, 1999).

**Basic obligations of families.** The first type of involvement includes the basic obligations of families (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Olmsted, 1991). This type of involvement entails a family's role in providing for a child's health and safety needs; developing parenting skills that prepare children for school and support healthy child development; and building positive home conditions that support school learning and appropriate behavior (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1992). It has also been reported that parent-child conversations about school experiences are associated with higher achievement. In further research, it has been concluded that parental encouragement of reading, parent-child conversations on

a multitude of topics, and displays of parental interest in a children's learning were among the home factors that were most predictive of academic learning (Bowen, 1999).

**Basic obligation of schools.** Secondly, the basic obligation of schools is to communicate with families through memos, notices, phone calls, report cards, and conferences. These initiatives are another important aspect in establishing constructive parent-school relationships (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Olmsted, 1991). Involvement at the school also includes the help of parents and other volunteers, in assisting teachers and administrators, children in the classroom, and in supporting student performances and activities (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991). Involvement in learning activities at home includes requests and guidance from teachers for parents to assist their children in the learning process which is coordinated with the child's classroom work (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Binford & Newell, 1991; Olmsted, 1991). Epstein also identifies that although families and schools share in the responsibility for student achievement, schools have the resources and ability to empower parents to take an active role in their child's education (Bowen, 1999.) Schools are able to affect parents' effectiveness in their home roles related to education, in several ways. For example, schools can provide information to parents regarding child development, school programs, curriculum requirements, and how to help with homework. Research indicates that parents are receptive to this information, and that parents want teachers to send more information home about classroom activities as well. Experimental research has indeed demonstrated that relaying information, skills, and resources to parents has a positive impact on school outcomes. Teachers who provide training to parents on how to provide academic help at home, as well as encouraging school success at home, has led to substantial achievement gains (Bowen, 1999).

**Participatory roles and collaboration.** Participatory roles assumed by parents include advocacy and participation in decision making, and active participation in

parent-teacher organizations and activities (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Brantlinger, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1992). Lastly, an important piece in the school's extensive programs for parent participation consists of collaboration and exchanges with community organizations, businesses, and other groups, which would provide wrap-around services and support to schools and families (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Brantlinger, 1991).

**Ensuring the partnership.** Important steps to take in ensuring these types of involvement are adequately facilitated, include recognizing and coordinating organizational rules and regulations (Comer & Haynes, 1991). This is done by establishing procedures regarding confidentiality, inviting parents to the school, having clearly defined roles and activities for parents, appropriate school accommodations, and continued assessment of the parent-school partnership. Continued staff development through in-service training workshops and continuing education are also necessary (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Brantlinger, 1991; Powell, 1991; Henderson, Hunt, & Day, 1993).

### **Success for Students and Parents**

Vast and continually expanding literature documents the significance of school and family partnerships for increasing student success and achievement in school; as well as improving and strengthening school programs for students and families (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Powell, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Binford & Newell, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Berger, 1991). Recent studies completed throughout the 1990's recognize that when the school involves parents and families in the educational development of their children, parents increase their interactions with their children at home, and express feeling more positive about their capabilities to help their children with their academics (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; (Olmsted, 1991; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). Parents who actively participate in their children's education also reveal that they hold a more positive outlook

regarding their child's teachers and academic experience (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). This is especially important for those families who are isolated. Parent and/or family activities held by the school, can relieve some of this isolation. These school sponsored activities can bring parents and families together, who may want to share their ideas, experiences, and knowledge (Brantlinger, 1991; Powell, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991). The reciprocal effect can be observed in different facets as well, such as teacher and faculty attitudes, and children's attitudes about their learning. Teachers may feel supported by parents and feel comfortable in talking with parents regarding their child's education (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Students who demonstrate a positive attitude about their learning may reflect an increase in their level of achievement and academic success (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Powell, 1991).

### **Teachers' Role and Practice in Engaging Parents**

Regardless of the elevated concentration to the issue of parent involvement in the current times, a small number of studies have focused on the teachers' role and practices of engaging parents in schools where behavioral concerns existed, or where schools were "disadvantaged" (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). A repetitive argument in many research studies of parent-school partnerships, is that less educated parents are not capable or do not want to participate in their child's education (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Lareau, 1987; Reynolds & Sukhdeep, 1994). However, research challenges this generalized argument by indicating that there are significant degrees in the role and level of school participation by less educated parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Clark, 1983; Scott-Jones, 1987; Reynolds & Sukhdeep, 1994), and that when teachers and school faculty actively engage parents, parents of all backgrounds can be involved in a productive and positive manner which enhances the school programs and academic achievement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Reynolds & Sukhdeep, 1994).

**Teachers as leaders.** A large-scale study of elementary teachers, parents, and students, for example, presented that teachers who were “leaders” in the abundant use of parent involvement did not form an opinion about less educated parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Instead, teachers rated all groups of parents superior in the parents’ level of helpfulness and follow-through in regards to learning activities with their children while at home. In contrast to this position demonstrated by teachers who do not prejudge, those teachers who make judgments, did not actively involve parents in their child’s education, and remained stereotypical of parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein, 1990; Becker & Epstein, 1982). Therefore, it is evident that a teacher’s attitude and judgment of parents and students, as well as a teacher’s role in engaging parent involvement, are important variables in completely comprehending how parents establish working partnerships with schools (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991). Epstein and Dauber (1991) convey that studies will persist in revealing that families who have more education will be more involved in their child’s education and academic achievement. However, it is applicable that when research includes the roles of teacher practices in engaging parent involvement towards all parents, this argument will decline in its relevance (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

**Parent inclusion.** The family is the immediate source and primary context for information and change regarding their children and the family as a whole. The effectiveness of school-based programs would be improved by including parents (Hopper et al., 1992). It seems true that most parents need guidance in knowing how to become active in their child’s education and becoming partners with their child’s school (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1994). Two steps in achieving this partnership are through school programs, and teacher practices in establishing family and school connections (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Smrekar, 1996; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). The results of a study done by Epstein and Dauber (1991), concluded, that overall, teachers in the inner city elementary and middle schools have positive attitudes about

parent involvement. As found, teachers with more positive attitudes toward parent involvement also place more importance on practices such as holding conferences with all students' parents, communicating with parents about school programs, and providing both positive and concerning reports regarding students' progress (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Teachers can make a connection with parents by having phone contact with parents, especially through a positive phone call regarding a child's success, or even through home visits. Inviting parents to the classroom at the beginning of the year to explain curriculum, classroom learning, and home learning activities, can provide an opportunity to make that initial contact with parents. Inviting parents to the classroom throughout the year to visit, or spend time watching their child learn, can help promote the parent-teacher partnership that amplifies a student's opportunity for success and achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

**Practices and values.** Parent-school partnerships are also indicative of the types and levels of teacher practices and values. Teachers' own assertiveness in volunteering within school programs correlates significantly with the strength of the school volunteer program ( $r = .390$ ). However, this correlation is not as significant with the school communication program ( $r = .155$ ). Teachers tend to place more emphasis on their own practices in the type(s) of involvement that are strong in their school as a whole (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). There is a correlation with teachers who believe parents are less supportive of parent involvement than the teacher themselves, and the report of their schools having fewer workshops ( $r = -.152$ ), fewer volunteers ( $r = -.140$ ), fewer methods to involve parents in learning activities at home ( $r = -.230$ ), and fewer opportunities for decision making ( $r = -.132$ ) (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). If teachers find that their parents are not as interested in being involved in a parent-school partnership, then teachers often use decreasing levels of practices to involve parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).



Parents often hold strong beliefs concerning communication with professionals which may in fact place a barrier between a parent-school partnership (Schaefer, 1991). Less educated and minority parents emphasize the need for family privacy and believe that information on the child's home is unnecessary for the teacher (Schaefer, 1991; Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985). These beliefs of hard-to-reach parents contribute to low rates of participation in parent education programs (Schaefer, 1991). Additionally, these mothers reported that they were uncomfortable with their child's teacher and perceived the teacher as too demanding (Schaefer, 1991; Schaefer, Edgerton, & Hunter, 1984).

Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) determined that teacher efficacy, or teachers' beliefs in their own teaching effectiveness, was the strongest predictor of teacher facilitation of five types of parent involvement: (1) parent-teacher conferences, (2) parent volunteering, (3) parent tutoring, (4) parent home instruction, and (5) parent support. Teacher efficacy was found to be a better predictor than even the socioeconomic status of the elementary schools (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991) to the finding that teacher efficacy is a critical variable in effective parent involvement activities. Swick (1988) added the argument that parent efficacy likewise affects parent involvement. It appears that both high-efficacy teachers and parents are essential ingredients in successful parent involvement activities.

Although involving parents as teachers of their own children usually takes place in the home, the role of the teacher is direct and central to its success (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow, 1995). The teacher is responsible for the planning, selection, and/or development of home learning materials and teaching procedures as well as the delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of activities (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Binford & Newell 1991). However difficult parent involvement activities may be for the teacher, supervision of learning activities at home may be the most educationally significant. Teachers identified five parent involvement procedures that they

felt were most important: reading with children; signing papers and folders; preparing materials; visiting homes, and summer learning at home (Greenwood & Hickman 1991).

**The self-contained classroom.** Although elementary and middle school teachers do not report much if any difference in their schools' programs to involve parents, teachers in the elementary schools report significantly stronger degrees of parent involvement than do those teachers in the middle school grades; ( $r = -.212$  to  $r = -.484$  versus  $r = -.121$ , not significant). Some of this difference is based on self-contained classrooms versus departmentalized classrooms; parents tend to volunteer within the self-contained classrooms rather than the departmentalized classrooms. As the research indicates, this is based on the finding that teachers who work in self-contained classrooms, within the elementary grade levels, will utilize parents more in their teaching practices of involving parents in their child's education. The grade in school, however, is the strongest correlate in relationship to parent involvement. The research finds that parents are more participatory in their child's education, through conferences and meetings, when their child is in the elementary grade level. In this particular study there was no significant correlation regarding the types of involvement and the percentage of students below average in academic achievement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

**Subject matter.** Earlier research discovered that elementary school teachers who frequently involve parents in learning activities at home are most likely to request involvement in reading or reading related activities (Becker & Epstein, 1982), and that these practices had some positive influence on the student's growth and reading success. In the present data from elementary and middle grade level teachers, there is some subject-specific connections regarding the teachers' practice of parent involvement; these engaging activities decrease with subjects such as math, science, and social studies (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Therefore, based on these findings, teachers may need more education and assistance in understanding how to involve parents in relationship to other subjects outside of reading (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Brantlinger, 1991; Henderson, Hunt,

& Day, 1993). For example, within-school and after-school programs in cardiovascular health that target only children have found to have some success, primarily in increasing children's knowledge about heart health. Although the individual is the starting point and ultimate target of health promotion activities, the family is the immediate source and primary contact for health information and education. The effectiveness of school-based programs may be improved by including parents in efforts to decrease cardiovascular disease risk factors (Hopper et al., 1992). In-service training and workshops are also valuable tools to bring knowledge and understanding to teachers about family dynamics, communication techniques, and conferencing skills (Brantlinger, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson, Hunt, & Day, 1993).

### **Educating Teachers**

Despite renewed emphasis on parental involvement, preservice programs do not consistently identify development of parent-teacher conferencing skills as a major objective. Inclusion of this topic varies from a separate course to integration in other courses. Field-based components address this topic in various ways, but cooperating school policies often hinder student participation in actual conferences and decision making processes relative to parental involvement. Identification of relevant, useful data and utilization of this data to design effective activities for preservice teachers is essential (Henderson, Hunt, & Day, 1993). In a study done by Young and Hite (1994) of the 972 responding institutions, 79.1% indicated that they offer one or more courses that include content dealing with parent involvement. This high level of offering is surprisingly positive and indicative of the serious direction institutions are taking in building positive parent-school partnerships (Young & Hite, 1994). Collaborative activities among institutions to share effective programs, between the institution and cooperating school to integrate skills with real world practice, and with the institution to design effective program components are essential (Henderson, Hunt, & Day, 1993).

Given such a wealth of research on parent involvement programs, it is reasonable to ask whether parent involvement now is emphasized in teacher education programs widespread. It has been largely documented that relatively few teacher workshops and in-service training offer teacher programs based on parent involvement. Such an indication suggests that parent involvement is not a major emphasis in American teacher education programs. However, if events in the home influence a host of student school performance variances at least as much as do the teacher and the school, would it not make sense that there be a parent-teacher relationship to effectively provide for the needs of children? Three models are suggested in providing this working relationship. First of all, there is the family impact model, in which the school reaches out to the home through home visits or various communication techniques; secondly, there is the school-impact model, in which parents are involved in the school as volunteers or in parent advisory committees, in an effort to change the school to the home; and in the community-impact model, the resources (medical, psychological) of the larger community are focused on facilitating a community-home-school-partnership (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

### **Links to Enhancing Parent Involvement**

Recognition of the importance of parent involvement in special education resulted in the Congressional mandate that schools and families cooperate in the planning of Individual Education Programs for students with disabilities. Specifically, the statute stipulates that parents must be notified of, and be afforded that opportunity to participate in, educational decisions that directly affect their child (Yanok & Derubetis, 1989).

**Family collaboration and programs.** Studies are finding that the degree to which schools engage parents and families, is dependent on guidance, collaboratives and wrap-around services, time constraints, duties assigned and added to teachers' roles, and small grants and financial accessibility (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Brantlinger, 1991; Powell, 1991; Smrekar, 1996). These variables, collaboratives and

wrap-around services, enable teachers to obtain and use data from parents, community professionals, and other teachers to help build and strengthen parent involvement programs (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Brantlinger, 1991). It becomes extremely important for schools to help parents and families obtain needed wrap-around services to those families who continue to experience problems with access to suitable services (Brantlinger, 1991; Smrekar, 1996; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

Parent participation in a well-structured, well-managed program can help eliminate harmful stereotypes that staff members may have about the community served by their school. Parents are also invaluable resources for the academic, social, and psychological development of students. When it is possible to engage parents in active support of the education of their children, the children have a source of support that extends from year to year (Comer, 1986).

**Family services coordinators.** Family services coordinators are often a critical piece in linking parent-school partnerships. Findings indicate that family service coordinators affected family-school interaction by moving schools from an emphasis on problem identification to problem solving; providing a new medium of communication between family and school that is more intensive and immediate; and creating a process that involved center coordinators in negotiating the expectations and demands of teachers and parents. This is a critical influence of a new and emerging actor on school culture and organizational leadership. When teachers and principals were asked about their impressions of the family service coordinators in their schools, many described the relief of having an extra set of legs to make a home visit to a parent who has no telephone; as well as having somebody to call and get help to remedy a situation, such as when a child has lice or requires eyeglasses. Parents, as well, echoed teachers' enthusiasm for the problem-solver and point-person role played by the family services coordinator, through the swift actions of these coordinators in response to parents' questions and concerns (Smrekar, 1996).

**Community resources.** Family resource centers have been established in many states. They provide information, resources, referrals, support, training, and education to parents, families, and other support persons who work with families from birth to adulthood. Family resource centers also provide space for family meetings, workshops, and other sponsored events. Community education programs and parent resource centers often collaborate regarding parent and family workshops and activity events. Collaborating within the community gives schools the ability to help engage all parents, single and working, in their children's education. Human service agencies, employers, and other community organizations, such as Head Start, Early Child and Family Education, and family cooperatives, can also be approached in working together to develop programs and services that enable as many parents and children as possible to benefit from programs and other events. A strong collaborative can respond to the needs of all families regarding special needs, cultural diversity, and multifaceted family systems (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

**Strengths perspective.** Since the beginning of formal education, the family has been viewed as a major learning environment (Powell, 1991; Schaefer, 1991; DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1994; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Jackson & Sullivan, 1993). In recent times, this belief has been fueled by research evidence pointing to the importance the role of family plays in predicting a host of child outcomes, including academic achievement (Powell, 1991; Parke, 1984; Schaefer, 1991; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Jackson & Sullivan, 1993). The number of youth who experience or are at high-risk for academic failure continues to represent a problem of epidemic proportions (DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1994). Therefore, the most significant focus of parent education should be on influencing parent characteristics (strengths) that contribute to competence and motivation of both parent and child. Earlier studies of interventions with parents and teachers that direct adults' attention to positive behavior in a child have reported both increases in child positive behavior and decreases in negative behavior (Schaefer, 1991).

Teaching parents to anticipate, perceive, and respond to positive behaviors can be an effective approach to parent education (Schaefer, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

**Strategies.** The following seven suggestions, are strategies that are needed to implement a parent involvement program: (1) Discuss attitudes about parent involvement with school personnel; (2) Establish program goals that meet the needs of the school and of families; (3) Include parents and school personnel in governing the program; (4) Include several types of parent involvement activities; (5) Utilize home visits to involve parents who do not respond to invitations or messages from school; (6) Increase attendance at parent meetings through a variety of means; and (7) Implement a parent-as-teacher component (Olmsted, 1991). Parents also have suggestions for the school on how to improve involvement. Two largely supported suggestions were: making parents feel more welcome at school; and giving parents more information about children's success (Chavkin & Williams, 1989). Successful family involvement acknowledges a parent's expertise about a child, as well as a parent's role in advocating for a child (Brantlinger, 1991).

#### **Relationship within the School System: The Teacher-Administrator Factor**

Another important relationship between parent-school partnerships, is the level of connectedness between teachers and principals and other administrative bodies. When there is a conflictual or non-supportive relationship between the principal and colleagues, this tends to minimize the level of parent involvement, is linked to weaker school programs, and occurs in schools with more disadvantaged students. The opposite is also true. When these relationships between teachers, principals, and other administrators are supportive and encouraging, the level of parent involvement in the school increases, and strong school programs are present (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

## **How Can Schools Support Families?**

A question that weighs heavily on the minds of policy makers and educators, is how can schools support families? More specifically the question asks, how can schools promote parents' involvement in their child's learning (Powell, 1991). There is a growing recognition that a family's ability to nurture children is connected with the quality of many community resources, including neighborhood, church, child care, work setting, housing, and medical care. School policy maker's and educator's awareness of the connection between children's academic performance and the quality of a family's ecological support system leads to obvious questions about what role, if any, schools might assume in strengthening the family's child-rearing competence (Powell, 1991; Schaefer, 1991; DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1994). Much of this shift in focus is due to the relationship that has stemmed from the dramatic changes in the structure, function, and ethnic diversity of American families (Powell, 1991).

Since the early 1970s, there have been a series of reports pointing to the vulnerable role of families in providing optimal child-rearing environments. The general theme of most of these reports is that rapid and complex societal changes have contributed to a decline in the resourcefulness of families for rearing children (Powell, 1991; DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1994). One of the recent analyses of the capacity of families to support their children's education is explained by James Coleman (1987). He argues that over the past 25 years, there has been an extensive erosion of social capital within families and communities for the proper rearing of young children. In the family, social capital refers to the presence of adults and the range of parent-child exchanges about academic, social, and personal matters. One major tension is whether the family should be the central focus of efforts launched by schools to accommodate the changes in American families. There has been ambivalence to this question through another perspective as well. Historically in the United States, there has been a discrepancy in the decision as to whether the family



should be a focus of educational attention for fear the autonomy and privacy of the family would be violated (Powell, 1991).

The types of support desired or needed by some families may not be within the conventional expertise of schools. When schools have responded to the question of how to support families, the answer sometimes has come in the form of structural adjustments in traditional modes of home-school relations (scheduling parent-teacher conferences to accommodate parents' work commitments) and in the use of school facilities for child or family activities considered to be noninstructional (before and after-school child care). In many situations, these structural accommodations may be deemed a sufficient school response to the needs of contemporary families. Historically, when schools have responded to the question of how to support families, there has been a substantive rather than structural one, generally in the form of parent education (Powell, 1991).

**Parent workshops.** Continuing to present and hold parenting workshops at the school can provide support to parents and families and engage them in participating in their child's education. The Office of Educational Research and Improvement suggest the following topics for parent workshops:

- How to help children with reading.
- How to make home learning materials.
- How to create educational games with your children.
- Grade level math or reading instructions for parents who want to tutor their children.
- Learning about computers - keeping ahead of the kids.
- How to handle the challenges of teenagers.
- Understanding the impact of separation and divorce on children.
- Developing a safe and secure environment for latchkey children.

Another beneficial strategy for involving parents, can be facilitated by teachers, by providing informal instruction in demonstrating to parents how they can help their child in a specific academic area (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

**Summer learning.** When schools provide summer learning packets to be done at home, they are providing another alternative for children and parents to work together in enhancing a child's education. This also promotes an opportunity for parents to become more in-tune to curriculum and learning as well. These summer packets can be designed specifically towards a particular age group or grade level. They can provide practice worksheets in any subject, as well as provide parent-child activities. These summer learning activities can also provide alternatives in learning through suggested reading materials, field trips, and community activities and summer programs. See **Appendix D** for technological support in academic learning and support (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

**School systems.** The quality of home learning can be determined, as well, through the level of support provided to parents, and teachers, by the school system. There are several venues in which school systems can establish this support and parent-school partnership. A school's philosophy should be clear in acknowledging and stating its support to parents in their role as educators at home, and in the parent-teacher partnership as well. This policy can be communicated through a parent handbook provided to all families; through newsletters and other pamphlets provided parents on a regular basis; through meetings and parent forums; personal contacts by teachers and other school personnel; and in other media and community events. Using community resources becomes an extremely valuable tool in reaching out to parents and families, and bringing together the parent-school partnership (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

A tool that can help promote a school's philosophy regarding its support to families, is by engaging families at the beginning of the school year. A school that promotes its support to families also sends the message at the beginning of the year that the school welcomes and expects all families to be partners in their child's education. This message can be conveyed through an open house at the school and through early fall mailings, a school calendar of important dates and activities, and other information packets sent to

families. Throughout the school year, the school's philosophy can be communicated through home visits, home learning activities, informal school gatherings or invitations to parents to visit the classroom, evaluating workshops or other in-service events, positive phone calls from teachers, and a yearly assessment of parent needs through surveys (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

### **Barriers to Fostering the Parent/School Partnership**

**Obstacles.** Programs that involve parents in the schools can play an influential role in creating a beneficial context for teaching and learning. However, there are two barriers of a positive parent-school partnership based on a strengths perspective. First of all, there are obstacles in the way of parent participation in the schools. Many schools simply do not want parents present and/or do not implement the necessary strategies in having parent participation in the school; thus, parents are often reluctant to actively participate. Some schools play "lip service" to the importance of parent participation but do not give the parents the opportunity to play a meaningful role in the school. Secondly, in most instances, parents are called to the school only when their child is having a problem (Comer, 1986; Moles, 1987).

**Responding to parent concerns.** Unfortunately, even when parents are invited into the schools, there is frequently no plan for using them effectively to improve the parent-school partnership. Where parent participation has not been successfully planned and structured is in regards to responding to parents' concerns about teaching methods, the goals of the school, and even the competence of the staff. These issues usually lead to conflict rather than problem-solving. Because of this, schools are often leery of a parent-school partnership. This is also seen in parent/teacher organizations, in which a school administrator, often the principal, is often in control. Parents often feel that their participation means little to the school staff and are often reluctant to become involved

(Comer, 1986). In a place where everyone could share and demonstrate their strengths, knowledge and ideas, and help, it seems to come down to who is right and wrong.

Properly planned and structured, parent participation could restore trust, respect, and mutual agreement between the home and the school. A successful parent/school partnership brings parents into the school at times other than when their children are in trouble. It uses parents as their strengths endure, and develops in them a sense of ownership in the school and a sense of responsibility in its outcomes. The presence of parents and the support they offer decrease conflict and apathy in the school. All these changes help to create a welcome and desirable school atmosphere (Comer, 1986).

**Demographic, social, and cultural differences.** Overwhelming support for parent involvement in education is found among families (Chavkin & Williams, 1989). However, demographic changes in families have left parents with less time to deal with their children. Although the family's influence on children should not be ignored, there should be serious thinking about ways to create and support other systems that provide children with experiences that have been within the realm of the family (Powell, 1991; Heath & McLaughlin, 1987; DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1994; Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Jackson & Sullivan, 1993). Heath and McLaughlin (1987) claim that both dual-career and single-parent families have very little time or energy to spend as partners in their children's education, visiting the school, attending conferences, or in allowing time for extracurricular activities for the children (Powell, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Jackson & Sullivan, 1993). Health problems also interfere with active participation in the school (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

Another complex facet to the lack of parental involvement is social and cultural factors (Finders & Lewis, 1994). For example, it is well documented that there is a lack of participation among parents of socially and culturally diverse students. These parents communicated feeling unheard at school, which creates tensions that interfere with positive home-school relations. For these parents, school experiences, economic and time

constraints, and linguistic and cultural practices have produced a body of knowledge about school settings that frequently goes unacknowledged. Clarifying how parents can help; encouraging parents to be assertive; developing trust; and recognizing the messages we send and language used; are facets that will build strong and appropriate relationships with these parents (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Dismuke, 1994).

**School experiences and beliefs.** Other barriers to parent involvement are based on attitudes and abilities of parents. Some parents do not value education for their children; others feel powerless to influence the school (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Jackson & Sullivan, 1993). Still others may believe that running schools should be left up to the experts (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Some parents believe they do not have the knowledge or social skills for volunteering in the classroom or serving on a parent advisory committee (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991). And because some parents had bad school experiences themselves, this experience may influence their perceptions of being an actively involved parent (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Findings suggest that students' homework represented a complex and multidimensional set of tasks for parents, for which they often felt ill-prepared, by both limitations in knowledge and competing demands for their time and energy. Strategies for involving parents more effectively in students' homework are beneficial to their children's learning (Hoover-Dempse, Bassler, & Burow, 1995).

**Social distance.** The literature indicates that considerable social distance generally exists between schools and families (Powell, 1991; Smrekar, 1996; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Kasting, 1994). Social distance can be explained by looking at two ends of a continuum; parents and families being on one end of the continuum, and teachers and school personnel being on the opposite end of the continuum; separate entities with separate roles. One of the primary reasons for social distance between schools and families is a desire on the part of schools to protect the autonomy of the school and its personnel (Powell, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991).

Optimal social distance, which avoids the extremes of isolation or intimacy, sustains the social structure of the school through its expectation that experts (teachers) handle uniform tasks and nonexperts (parents) handle nonuniform tasks (Powell, 1991; Smrekar, 1996; Cochan & Dean, 1991). According to this view, the educational process breaks down when nonexperts attempt to handle all uniform tasks, or when experts dominate all uniform and nonuniform tasks. A view of schools as a family support system does not alter existing safeguards to limit parental tampering with the professional judgments of teachers. The focus of attention is on the needs of families, not the needs of schools, and the direction of helping is from school to family (Powell, 1991).

A related source of social distance between schools and families is the respective roles of parents and teachers through the child. Parents and teachers maintain different relationships with the same child, and as a result typically view the child in distinctive ways, which may in turn lead to teacher and parent relationships as being enemies. However, this contribution to school-family social distance seems unlikely to hinder schools from supporting families if school programs and personnel do not allow their unique relationship with children to define the nature of work with families. That is, parent-teacher conflict resulting from different views of the same child is unlikely to occur in parent-focused programs and practices that recognize the family's perspective on the child and avoid approaching parents primarily within the framework of the teacher-child relationship (Powell, 1991).

### **A Continuum of Ideas for Parent Involvement**

**Role of the school social worker.** Because of a school social worker's training and education in communication, families, the ecological perspective, and cultural diversity, the school social worker is well suited to be school-based leaders in supporting home educational roles of parents. School social workers have a responsibility and desire to promote student, and family, success; and they see their work, largely with parents, as a

very important and necessary element. Research surrounding the role of the school social worker, has pointed out that much of the role is geared towards working with parents, and being the liaison between the home and the school. This contact with parents has been mostly by phone, but has also taken place at a family's home or even at the school. The key role for the school social worker is to gather information from the teacher as well as the family, in an effort to promote student success in education, as well as social behavior, and improvement in parent-teacher communication (Bowen, 1999)

In a research study involving a school social work intervention that focused on providing parents with information and resources from the school, a variety of benefits became apparent. These benefits included: improvement in the quality and quantity of parent-teacher information; more use of school learning resources at home; the ability to respond quickly to concerns of parents and teachers; the ability to monitor student success; and most notably, the parent and teacher perceptions of academic gains for a student. The results this research intervention suggest, is that school social workers can promote student school success by directly facilitating parent-teacher communications and ensuring that educational resources are shared with parents. School social workers task preferences, based on this research, include helping school staff recognize differences in values and in understanding diversity. School social workers can provide a valuable service to parents and students by coordinating the creation of a resource of ideas and materials that are accessible to parents and school staff (Bowen, 1999).

Having a school social worker or family services coordinator working with schools and families, can decrease the level of social distance, creating a more close-knit partnership (Smrekar, 1996). The role of the principal is also a critical piece in parent involvement. What parents want from the principal is to be treated with respect and as equals; they do not want a professional-client relationship (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Williams and Chavkin (1989) concluded that successful parent involvement programs have seven

common elements: written policies; administrative support; training; partnership approach; two-way communication; networking; and evaluation.

**Resources.** Elementary school programs of parent involvement are presently stronger, more positive, and more comprehensive (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). A suggestion for continued growth in the parent-school partnership is to begin by establishing a library for parents that contains recent articles, books, videos, and other home learning materials and activities; and where these materials can be made available to parents and families (Brantlinger, 1991). In creating a welcoming and supportive atmosphere, the school can also provide space where families can meet together or with school personnel; whether it is to look at available materials, establish relationship with teachers or other parents, or to have a comfortable place for a meeting or conference. Parent reports of providing educational experiences through the use of the public library, buying books, and enrolling their child in extra-curricular lessons and preschool are correlated with higher intelligence test scores and teacher ratings of child intelligence, curiosity, and creativity during kindergarten (Schaefer, 1991; Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985).

In demonstrating a commitment to parents and families, schools can provide resources for at home learning such as:

- Releasing staff to work with families and providing a budget for home-learning activities.
- Providing clerical and printing assistance to teachers when they develop materials for parents.
- Providing easy access to phones for teachers to call families.
- Investing in school programs on cable television.
- Building partnerships with local organizations to jointly support home learning activities.

Because it takes time to design home-learning materials and activities, volunteers or other designated persons, could be recruited to help with the task of gathering these materials



and producing portfolios that are effective and efficient in providing quality home-learning materials. See **Appendix E** for innovative programs developed to help inspire the home-school connection (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

### **Looking Towards the Future**

**Parent/teacher challenges.** Schools and parents face a challenge in working together to provide the necessary education and support that children need. To do this, parents must continue to be involved with the schools, and schools must continue to reach out to parents. Parent participation in the schools includes at least five levels of involvement, from an active partner to a passive supporter. First of all, the parent must be an active partner and educational leader at home and school. The parent must also act as a decision maker regarding a child's education. Parents can increase their level of participation by working as a school volunteer or paid employee. Fourthly, the parent can act as a liaison between home and school to support homework and other home learning activities. Lastly, the parent must act as a supporter of the educational goals of the school to help foster the continued growth and development of the child (Berger, 1991). A conceptualization of parent involvement in children's schooling that integrates developmental and educational constructs and includes both a general definition as well as specific dimension is also suggested. Parent involvement in this framework is defined as the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within a given domain. One dimension is based on the child's phenomenological experience. In this dimension the child must experience the resources for them to have their influence. The parent can overtly manifest involvement through his or her behavior by going to school, and participating in activities such as open houses. Parents' personal involvement includes the child's affective experience that the parent cares about school, and has and enjoys interactions with them around school. Thirdly, cognitive and intellectual growth involves

exposing the child to cognitively stimulating activities and materials such as books and current events (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994).

**Parent education.** An examination of recent descriptions of exemplary school-based family support initiatives, show that parent education is a common and frequently dominant program element (Powell, 1991; Kagan, 1987; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). There are specific goals in schools who provide parent education to families. Parent education should contribute to parent understanding of the relationship of child rearing and educational beliefs and values to the achievement of goals for children (Schaefer, 1991; Powell, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Kasting, 1994). When values enter into the selection of the content of the parent education program, what is important and what is not important, a possible conflict may arise between parents and educators. It is important for the educator to know and state his own values, work with parents to do the same with theirs, assist in the achievement of those which are agreed upon, and seek democratically to win the parent to his point of view where they disagree by rational persuasion. Education for parents and future parents should increase knowledge of children's learning in the home and community and of parents' contribution to that learning. Increasing knowledge of parental roles of not only providing but also planning, organizing, and procuring educational experiences should be a goal of parent education (Schaefer, 1991; Kasting, 1994).

**Support networks.** A far greater challenge for schools is to emphasize or include the provision of social support in work with parents (Powell, 1991; Kasting 1994). The use of discussion time in a parent group meeting illustrates the distinction between social support and education (Powell, 1991). It is also important that school professionals do not demonstrate a patronizing demeanor with parents and families. Likewise, there is a need to be truly open to parental choice and build harmonious relationships with parents and families. Successful family involvement acknowledges a parent's expertise about a child, as well as the parent's role in advocating for the child (Brantlinger, 1991).

In support-oriented groups, discussion is a means of developing ties with other individuals, enabling members to increase the size and resourcefulness of their social networks. Group discussion also serves a social comparison function, allowing members to realize that their parenting experiences and feelings may be similar to those of others. Support-oriented groups devote considerably less group time to the formal presentation of child development information than do information-based groups. In these groups, the leader acts less like an expert and more like a facilitator, encouraging parents to report their experiences and strengthen their relations with others in the group. The greatest challenge for most schools is to improve the conditions of family functioning either through parent education content that helps parents pursue strategies of improving their life circumstances (training on how to cope with work-family conflicts), or through the provision of direct services, such as transportation (Powell, 1991).

**School-based programs.** What continues to remain a question, is whether these school-based programs should be available for all parents and families, or if these programs should be targeted towards special populations. An influential component of the argument that all families need some type of support for child rearing is the anticipated and realized consequences of rapid social, cultural, and economic changes. Rationales for the universal availability of a parent program that is based on extreme descriptions of widespread family vulnerability conflict with the antideficit and wellness perspectives because the families-are-at-risk view sustains the idea that families need to be at the end of their ropes before support is provided. Decisions about universal versus targeted programs involve a trade-off between equity and stigma because a major problem with universal programs is that they may not reach less advantaged populations unless special provisions are mandated (Powell, 1991).

## **Further Exploration**

An area of research for educators to explore, particularly within their own school setting, is learning the needs, aspirations, and characteristics, of the school and family population. This is executed in order to reduce the possibility of launching initiatives based on family myths rather than realities (Powell, 1991). Continued exploration into the cultural facets of parent-school partnerships is essential as well. Together parents and schools need to examine the needs of parents (transportation, educational deficits, time, and money) and their philosophy regarding cultural and ethnic diversities. Programs that have been developed and facilitated with specific school districts are highlighted in **Appendix A**. These programs outline program tools, membership, roles, responsibilities, and goals, in building strong parent-school partnerships.

A countless number of variables exist within families and communities. What role does child development play in implementing programs at pre-school age? How do schools welcome new families into the school district? Are parents involved in implementing wrap-around services for their child and for their family? Do schools communicate with parents about success and achievement, or solely when a child is having difficulties in school? Thus, further examination is needed to separate and explore these variables in order to interpret and accurately represent the various types of families. This could allow researchers and educators to examine a family's role in their child's education and the school-parent partnership. Existing variables to be further considered are: education, income level, community size, age, gender, marital status, ethnicity and multicultural practices, and geographic access to school, to name a few (Chavkin & Williams, 1989; DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1994).

In analyzing the existing literature, it seems apparent that school achievement is fostered by a positive relationship between the school and the family. However, this is one piece of the puzzle. A number of supplementary factors that have not been examined in the literature surrounding successful school achievement involve the following: the school

environment, teacher's style and grading system, implementation of a new curriculum and testing standards, a child's past experience in school, a child's personality, and community and cultural influences; and most importantly is the familial role and value system (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993). As researchers, we must also look at achieving problem-solving tactics to successfully deal with the existing social problems, financial capabilities, and technological capacities, in eliminating the barriers to a healthy and effective parent-school partnership.

Necessary changes must take place in school practices to accommodate the multifaceted changes that have taken place in families, communities, roles, and structures. Schools must take into consideration the existing roles of parents, due to work obligations, in their expectations about parent participation, and expand initiatives aimed at working with families to make participation possible. Thus, schools face important challenges in altering programs for families, in becoming a family and community resource, and as one of many influences on a child's development.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

As the literature has documented and emphasized, there is a tremendous link between the parent-school partnership, and the success of student achievement in school, as well as parent success in providing for the educational needs of their children (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Powell, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Binford & Newell, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Berger 1991). The parent-school partnership necessitates several areas of involvement from both school personnel and from parents and families (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Olmsted, 1991). A family's role is defined by providing children with a readiness for school, supporting healthy child development, and building positive home conditions that support school learning and healthy behavior choices (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1992). A school's role requires a responsibility to communicate with families by using memos, notices, phone calls, report cards, and holding conferences (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Olmsted, 1991). School involvement can also be demonstrated when parents volunteer to aid teachers in the classroom, administrators in clerical tasks, or in fundraising types of events (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991). Teachers can also offer guidance to parents in learning activities at home, which may be part of a child's classroom work (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Brantlinger, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991). A very meaningful tool in fostering the parent-school partnership, is through collaborative exchanges with community organizations, businesses, and other groups, which would provide wrap-around services and support to school and families (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Brantlinger, 1991).

There have been astounding changes in the structure, capacity, and cultural diversity of American families. From the beginning of the 1970s, there have been a number of reports aimed towards the defenseless role of families in providing a healthy, positive, and

appropriate environment for child development, learning, and building parent-child relationships. The focus of these reports that have been established since the early 1970s, is that these continuous and dramatic changes in the social environment and structure of families has produced a rapid shift and decline in a family's resourcefulness. Families have lost their support networks which have guided them and helped them raise their children and provide a positive and appropriate environment in which children can learn and grow. The shift in how schools, communities, and families look at parent involvement in the school, which is to establish a working partnership instead of being completely separate entities, seems to reflect this need for family support systems. Epidemic concerns about the stresses on today's families has opened the door in finding strategies that help strengthen families (Powell, 1991; Coleman, 1987).

What has resulted over the years is a rotting away of social capital within families and communities (Powell, 1991; Coleman, 1987). Thus, the conceptual framework that ties into the basis of the argument that a parent-school partnership is an invaluable resource for school achievement and family oriented connectedness, is the theory of social capital. James Coleman (1987) has presented one of the current analyses of the capacity of families to support their children's education. Coleman (1987) has argued that over the last 25 years, social capital has suffered neglect, and is withering away to a nonexistent venue of resourcefulness. Within the family system, social capital refers to the presence of an adult within the home that provides the necessary exchanges with a child or children regarding social, developmental, academic, and personal issues. In the community environment, social capital encompasses the norms of social mores and social control in helping guide children and youth. Social capital within the community means that kids have access to adult-sponsored activities and programs; and that the opportunity for appropriate and safe adult-child exchanges exist within the community, for example, an adult to lend a sympathetic ear to problems that kids do not feel comfortable talking about with their own parents. The sense of community is being lost within this shifting structure,

and families are indicating that they no longer have the time or energy it requires in adequately teaching and preparing their children for school, for growing up, and for life. Social capital consists of the resources that families have used in developing their support networks (Powell, 1991). Because of the decaying presence of social capital, a growing number of children are not prepared to flourish, and function, successfully in school today.

In establishing social capital as the conceptual framework, an alternative response to the loss of community relationship between families, is the fostering of the parent-school partnership. It is true that most parents need guidance and support in knowing how to become active in their child's education and learning (Epstien & Dauber, 1991; DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1991). Because this is true, as a community, we must rebuild our social capital. This can be done within an environment that fosters growing and learning, and works on developing relationships with children and families. Teaching and guiding parents to respond to their children and work with their developmental strengths, can be an effective tool in rebuilding social capital. (Powell, 1991; Schaefer, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). It has been documented that teachers feel empowered and supported by parents who are actively involved in their children's school and education (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). The benefits of a strong parent-school partnership are empowering for families and their children, and these benefits are widely documented. Parents can develop confidence in being able to help their children academically, and in the process work on building stronger and healthier relationships with their children (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Powell, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). This relationship between the school and families lends a hand to the growth and development of children, which may incorporate a more positive outlook regarding their learning and success in school and with friends (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Ginsburg and Bronstein, 1993; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). What happens as a result of a



relationship between schools and families, is a reciprocal collaboration of guidance and support, and a perspective based on the strengths of this partnership.

The role of schools in the lives of families has become the topic of interest regarding family support systems because of the school's strength as being a resource delivery system and because of a school's access to a large population . Schools are knowledgeable about wrap-around services within the community; they are aware of parent groups, and often provide these support groups or family activities within the school; and schools have the means to communicate and organize social collaboratives, events, and sponsorship of social gatherings and support networks (Powell, 1991). The two most important places in which children spend their time and grow and learn, is at home and at school. Thus parents and teachers have the opportunity to build strong relationships with children, and with the presence of adults, the range of parent-child exchanges about academic, social, and personal matters, can flourish. This is social capital.

## **METHODOLOGY**

**Introduction to Design.** An exploratory study which addressed the role, needs, and barriers, of parent participation was conducted using surveys to parents who have a child or children enrolled at Cambridge Elementary School, grade Kindergarten through Fourth grade. A population of one-hundred parents were randomly selected to participate in this study and complete the survey.

The information obtained in the survey has provided data regarding the level of participation parents have in their child or children's education; how teachers initiate this participation with parents and families; additional needs parents have from the teacher or school; and what barriers may prevent parents from actively participating in their child or children's education. This information will enable the school, families, community agencies, and other practitioners to generate new insights into the role that parents and teachers take in education, as well as provide a basis for developing new goals that will allow the development of a positive parent-school partnership.

**Research Questions.** This research study has addressed the following research questions:

- What role are parents taking in fostering the parent-school partnership?
- How do teachers involve parents in a child's education?
- In what ways would parents like teachers to involve them in their child's education?
- Are there any barriers that prevent parents from actively fostering the parent-school partnership?

### **Concept Definitions**

Important concepts to define based on this research design are: parent-school partnership; active parent role and active teacher role; basic parent obligations and basic

teacher role; and the parent advocacy role. It is adequately documented that schools cannot educate children alone, and need the support and participation of parents. The reverse is true as well. In the changing times and issues that families face today, parents as well cannot educate their children alone. Parents and schools need the support of each other in allowing children to obtain healthy attitudes about education and in giving them the opportunity to be successful.

**The parent-school partnership.** The parent-school partnership reflects a working relationship between parents and teachers in promoting the best interest of a child and that child's needs, including progress and development, and other program options if warranted. A positive parent-school partnership includes open communication initiated between both parents and teachers, collaborating on ideas, strengths, development, and progress of the child.

**The parents' active role.** The emphasis in this research defines the parents' active role as participating in several of the following ways: regular communication with teachers (phone, school visits, conferences); reading and signing memos and notices when appropriate; working with their child on homework (providing supervision, completing parent-child homework assignments, signing off on homework); attending meetings and school sponsored events (conferences, workshops, activities, school board meetings); and visiting the school (having lunch with a child, observing a child's classroom, volunteering, attending programs during the school day or after school).

**Basic obligations of parents.** The basic obligations of parent participation is based on the parenting role at home. This includes providing for the child's health and safety; preparing the child for school; teaching values, promoting healthy attitudes, and teaching appropriate behavior and social skills.

**Parent advocacy role.** This is defined as a parent who goes beyond the realm of taking an active role, and participates in the decision making role within the school as well. This is demonstrated when a parent has a role in a parent-teacher organization;

participates in school board meetings, or other advisory committees within the school or community education program.

**The teachers' active role.** When we talk about the teachers' active role, we are referring to the teachers participating in several of the following ways: regular communication with parents (phone, conferences conducted as needed, home visits if applicable); sending home notes and memos for parents; including the parents in the child's learning by creating parent-child homework assignments or having the parent sign off on homework; inviting the parent to the school to observe their child, volunteer in the classroom, have lunch with a child, or on field trips or program activities; attend after-school programs and activities and other pertinent school meetings.

**Basic obligations of the school.** This includes having communication with parents regarding school programs and student progress through regular conferences; as well as having communication with parents through memos, notices, and report cards; and that the teacher and school work to improve all parents' understanding of school programs and student learning.

### **Measurement Tool and Procedures**

A survey was used as the research instrument in this study to find the answer to the following research questions, (1) What role are parents taking in fostering the parent-school partnership? (2) How do teachers involve parents in a child's education; and in what ways would parents like teachers to involve them in their child's education? (3) Are there any barriers that prevent parents from actively fostering the parent-school partnership? This is a largely quantitative measurement tool that contains ten Likert-scale questions and ten close-ended questions (in check-list style and categorical style). However, this measurement tool also contains a qualitative piece in that it provides space for the participant to provide their personal comments, experiences, and other information a parent finds pertinent to share regarding their participation.

Prior to sending out the surveys to the study population, a pre-test was conducted. Three parents who had children enrolled in a school outside of the Cambridge Elementary School received the survey to do a voluntary pre-test. The purpose of this pre-test was to acquire feedback regarding the survey (length, understandable directions and questions, etc.) and to determine the approximate length of time needed to complete the survey.

**Study population and Location.** The units of analysis for this research study, are individuals, specifically parents who currently have a child enrolled at Cambridge Elementary School, grade Kindergarten through the Fourth grade. A population of one-hundred parents received the survey in the mail during the month of March 1999.

The Cambridge Elementary school district is a large school located in a rural town approximately 60 miles north from the metropolitan areas of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota. This school consists of 55 teachers (classroom, special education, reading, art, computers, phy ed, and media), and has approximately 890 students enrolled. The population of the community and of the school itself, is predominately a Caucasian community with a relatively small percentage of cultural or racial diversity.

**Procedures.** A random selection of 100 parents has been conducted by the Cambridge Elementary school secretary and school paraprofessionals based on the parent-student directory. The school secretary printed out the address labels of all parents of children currently enrolled at Cambridge Elementary School. The school secretary divided the labels by grade, in an effort to have equal representation from each grade, grades Kindergarten through fourth. A selection of 20 parents from each grade, with a total population of 100 parent participants, was done by defining a random start and random interval (the researcher selected a random interval of 25; however this was not a systematic sample), in which to go through the parent directory. Starting with the first parent label on the first page, every twenty-fifth parent was chosen, going straight down the list, until 20 parents were randomly selected. This operation was facilitated for each of the five grade levels, for a total of 100 parent participants. If a parent was chosen in

another grade level selection, then the next parent label was chosen, as to not duplicate parent participants.

The school paraprofessionals were given the stuffed envelopes which contained the cover letter, survey, and return self-addressed stamped envelope; and placed the parent labels on the mailing envelopes and mailed the surveys to the homes of the parents. After parents completed the survey, the surveys were mailed to a separate mailbox at Augsburg College, to ensure the continuum of anonymity.

**Protection of human subjects.** The survey population was kept anonymous, as the survey does not contain identifying questions or information. The researcher did not know to which parents the survey was mailed, as this selection was done by the school secretary and school paraprofessionals. Only the researcher had access to returned surveys, which were mailed to a private mailbox at Augsburg College. A cover letter addressing these issues was attached to the mailed survey; and this cover letter also communicated that parents could skip any question they were not comfortable answering, yet still remain a participant in this research. Cambridge Elementary has received a summary of the results of this research regarding parent participation at Cambridge Elementary School.

The questions outlined on the survey are based on the findings and information gathered from the review of literature. These questions are not highly sensitive or personal questions. The questions revolve around what a particular person does, as well as what that person believes, about the parent-school partnership and engagement of roles and activities. Therefore, there was a low risk factor that this survey caused harm to participants, especially with the anonymity present in this research design.

Parent participation in completing the survey was voluntary. The consent form for participating in this research was attached to the survey; and returning the completed survey indicated the participant's consent to participate in the study.

**Parent Survey.** The survey was designed to acquire information regarding parents perception of their level of involvement in their child's education and specifically what actions they take in being involved with the school and with their child's education. The survey was also designed to obtain feedback from parents on how their child's teacher involves them [the parents] in a child' education, and in what ways parents would like teachers to involve them as well.

The survey begins with ten Likert-scale questions that asked for the parent's response to a specific statement or question. Within the survey the response scale appeared as such:

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Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

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After reading the statement or question, the parent was asked to choose the answer that best represents their belief. Neutral was specified as meaning that one neither agrees nor disagrees. Some questions also asked for a parent's level of satisfaction in the form of Likert-scale questions.

Following the Likert-scale questions, participants were asked to identify what actions they demonstrate, or their child's teacher demonstrates, regarding parent participation. These questions were in the form of check-list questions. The questions contained a list of different activities, such as: do homework with my child; attend school conferences; visit my child's classroom. Parent participants were asked to identify all that applied to them in their current experience.

Multiple choice questions were also part of the survey. The check-list questions, as well as most of the multiple choice questions, contained a space that allowed participants

to identify other answers not already provided directly in the survey question. For example:

1. How much time each week do you spend with your child/children on school homework, learning, and practice?  
☐ less than one hour ☐ 1-2 hours ☐ 2.5-3.5 hours ☐ 4-5 hours ☐ more than 5 hours.
2. Would you participate in parent education programs: ☐ Yes ☐ No
- b. Please specify topics of interest: \_\_\_\_\_

The last question on the survey to parents, gave the participant an opportunity to provide comments or information regarding the parent-teacher partnership, that was not addressed directly in the survey questions.

The survey questions ask parents to identify and provide information in the following areas regarding the parent-school partnership:

- participation in their child's education
- the parent's role in participating in a child's education
- the teacher's role in involving parents in a child's education
- what would parents like teachers to do to involve them in their child's education
- is parent-teacher communication comfortable
- the level of information parents receive regarding their child's education
- home learning activities
- participation in school policy, school goals, and classroom curriculum
- school activities, programs, and other school sponsored events
- volunteerism
- weekly homework hours
- what barriers prevent school participation and involvement
- the school's role in providing a safe and comfortable environment for students and families.



The goal of this research and particularly the specific questions formulated in the survey, was to help identify the role, needs, and barriers of parent participation; and provide a basis for developing goals within the school, the family, and the community, that will help foster this parent-school partnership. See **Appendix B** for specific survey questions.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The degree in which schools and parents work together for the benefit of a child's education, growth and learning, is dependent on the actions of all members involved; such as the parent, the teacher, and the school. Based on the Likert-scale questions and the categorical responses, which are mutually exhaustive and mutually exclusive, as well as ranked from higher to lower, this is an ordinal level of measurement. There is no degree of measurement between 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. These numbers are used to identify the response on the scale of answers.

**Data collection.** Information was collected upon receipt of completed surveys. This information consisted largely of data that was quantitative; however, qualitative data was also gathered based on the open-ended questions in the survey. Data was recorded from the survey instrument by identifying and recording subject categories (survey questions and independent variables; for example, number of hours parents and children work on homework, or signing papers, attending meetings, etc.) into the computer data base. Each returned survey received a number, beginning with one, and was entered into the data base file under the column category 'participants'. Each question from the survey has a column category (the check-list categories have several columns based on the number of possible choices), and the responses are listed as the independent variables. The data base is comprised of 69 variable categories based on the design of the survey questions. Defined in group terms, these categories include: the number of parents who actively participate in their child's education; specific tasks and activities parents demonstrate in participating in their child's education; specific tasks and activities teachers demonstrate to

involve parents in their child's education; in what ways would parents like teachers to involve them in their child's education; should parents be involved in the decision making roles (school policy, curriculum, activities and programs) at school; are parents satisfied with the level of information they receive regarding their child; home-work activities and parent-child home learning activities; participation in school sponsored programs, activities, meetings, and other events; summer learning programs; and barriers to actively participating in a child's education.

**Data analysis.** The data collected was used to make conclusions about the parent-school partnership at Cambridge Elementary school, which is presented in the discussion chapter. Specifically, the data was used to identify the role, needs, and barriers, in the parent-school partnership, from the parents point of view. The explanation of results are used to answer the following research questions:

- What role are parents taking in fostering the parent-school partnership?

In answering this research question, the data allowed the researcher to identify specific parent activities and establishing parent roles from obligatory roles, active parent roles, and advocacy parent roles.

- How do teachers involve parents in a child's education; and in what ways would parents like teachers to involve them that the teacher is not currently doing?

Again, in answering this research question, the data allowed the researcher to identify specific tasks and activities on how teachers involve parents in their child's education. In examining this data, the researcher looked at specific changes teachers can make, whether the data has concluded that parents want teachers to do more in how they can engaged parents, or whether parents believe they would like teachers to decrease their level of involvement with the family.

- Are there any barriers that prevent parents from actively fostering the parent-school partnership?

Through the parent survey, data identified what barriers prevent parents from coming to the school, or what barriers prevent parents from participating in school programs, meetings, extra-curricular activities, and other school sponsored events.

The data analysis was able to conclude how parents perceive their role in the partnership with the school, and how they perceive the school's role should be as well. The information and explanation of results can help provide parents and teachers feedback in what efforts they can take in fostering the parent-school partnership; as well as provide a basis for establishing what steps can be taken to reach the goals developed for a positive and constructive working parent-school partnership.

**Measurement issues.** The survey questions are designed to reflect the meaning and roles of the parent-school partnership. The questions were based on the review of literature and devised to represent different ways in which parents and teachers can participate in fostering the parent-school partnership. In answering the research question, the responses to the survey questions provided the researcher with the level of participation and interest in which parents and teachers take in the role of fostering this relationship.

The data collected is consistent and true to the concept being measured: the parent-school partnership and level of involvement. To the degree that participants in this research chose to answer the survey questions at random or inconsistently, there exists a level of random error. Perhaps there may also be systematic bias involved if the participants chose to answer the questions based on social desirability or chose answers that would portray themselves as an active parent; when in fact they may not take an active role in their child's education. If the participant has had a less than desirable experience with Cambridge Elementary, this too can increase the level of bias in the participant's response to the survey questions. Because the surveys are anonymous and not completed face-to-face, the error of an acquiescent response set is not a problematic situation of this research design.

In order to reduce the level of random error in this research design, the researcher obtained feedback from peers and colleagues regarding the survey, for the following reasons: to use unbiased words, and to use terms that people will understand; as well as the consistency and relevance of questions in providing a valid testing instrument. As previously stated a pretest was given to a small number of parents of a rural community school to potentially increase the validity and reliability of the testing measurement.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

**Strengths.** The strength of this particular research study at Cambridge Elementary School, is the significant information provided in helping both parents and teachers set goals in improving the parent-school partnership; and implementing those roles appropriate to establishing this working relationship. The parent-school partnership remains a viable asset in building positive values in children and helping them achieve their potential and be successful. Research clearly supports the benefits for children, as well as parents and teachers, in having a positive parent-school partnership. Sometimes, just knowing what one party wants from another party, is helpful communication in achieving goals; and many times people are afraid to communicate their needs at the risk of creating a ripple in calm waters. An anonymous survey gives participants an opportunity to express their experience, and be heard, in a way that does not compromise their privacy, feelings, or relationship between the school.

Another strength of this study, is that the concept of the research, parent involvement, clearly correlates with the survey instrument in defining and analyzing the level of involvement from parents and teachers, and also provides an open-ended factor in communicating needs and suggestions not outlined in the survey. The themes identified on the survey hold important implications for schools and families as they work to relate effectively with each other.

**Limitations.** Although the data obtained from these surveys has provided important information for both parents and teachers, the findings are limited due to being derived from a single study that involves a limited view of demographics. A more in-depth study would produce more significant findings. The study does not represent a multitude of different kinds of information that would be helpful for the school district in helping encourage and implement successful parent participation. This study solely identifies the level of participation and possible barriers of participation from a parent's point of view. A researcher could obtain a more comprehensive examination of the demographic, cultural, social, family, and educational factors, in analyzing the parent-school partnership at Cambridge Elementary School. Because this survey population was small, and 60% of the parent population (60 out of 100 parents) did not respond to the survey, the results cannot be generalized to that of the entire Cambridge Elementary School parent population. However, because participants in this research were used only from one school setting, the results cannot be generalized towards all parents who have a child enrolled within an elementary or secondary school setting.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study has provided a beginning basis for implementing change by developing goals and strategies in how a community, school, and family, can encourage and facilitate a positive parent-school partnership. As a community member and/or a member of the school district, this can help identify specific roles in working with this partnership and helping to foster parents-teachers-school to work together for the needs of children and families. That is the responsibility of each community and each member in that community. Social workers often bring families and schools together in providing adequate information for problem-solving, or in providing appropriate services for children and families. Recognizing and understanding the needs of parents and teachers is

a significant tool in creating a positive relationship and building a successful future for families and school; and for fostering the healthy growth and development of children.

## FINDINGS

Out of the one-hundred parent surveys that were mailed out to parents at Cambridge Elementary School, forty parent participants completed and returned the survey on parent participation. The data obtained through the surveys was used to determine what role parents are taking in their child's education; what teachers are doing to engage parents to actively participate in the school; parents' perception of wanting or having a voice in school policy, goals, and curriculum; parents' perception of school programs and activities; and what, if any, barriers parents have in actively participating in a child's education.

**Parent Perceptions of School Involvement.** The first six questions on the survey to parents were based on a Likert-scale model, addressing parent perceptions of the parent-school partnership between parents and teachers. All forty parent participants responded to these first set of questions; therefore  $n=40$  in presenting the following results.

In asking parents if they actively participate in their child's/children's education, 60% (24 parents) of the parents responded that they strongly agree that they do indeed actively participate in their child's/children's education. Overall, 97.5% (39 parents) of the parents agreed that they are active participants in their child's education. This is based on the Likert-scale question responses: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly disagree. Only one parent felt strongly that he or she did not actively participate in his or her child's education.

Based on the same Likert-scale response set described above, parents were asked to choose the best response that is indicative of the extent to which parents believe that teachers work to actively involve parents in a child's education. With forty parent responses to this question, 25 parents (62.5%) agreed that the teachers at Cambridge Elementary School do actively involve parents in a child's education. Overall, 82.5% of

the parents (33 parents) agreed or strongly agreed that teachers do in fact involve them in their child's education. Five percent of the parents (2 parents) identified that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

How comfortable are you in communicating with your child's/children's teacher?

Parents responded quite favorable to this question. Overall, 92.5% of the parent participants (37 parents) circled the response that they (the parent) were very comfortable or comfortable in being able to communicate comfortably with teachers. Five percent of the parents (2 parents) indicated that they were neutral on this position; while 2.5% (one parent) felt very uncomfortable communicating with the child's teacher.

The next two questions asked parents to identify how satisfied they were with the information they received from teachers about their child or children. The Likert-scale set responses included: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied. Regarding the level of information parents receive about their child's education, 77.5% of the parents (31 parents) stated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the level of information they received; while 12.5% of the parents (5 parents) were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the level of information they received regarding their child's education. Ten percent of the parents (10 parents) remained neutral on this subject. In determining the level of satisfaction parents have with getting answers to the questions they have regarding their child's education, 82.5% (33 parents) responded positively (very satisfied or satisfied) to this question. Two parents (5%) identified that they were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with a teacher's response to the questions they had about their child's education. Five parents (12.5%) remained neutral regarding this question.

Lastly in this first set of questions, parents responded to the question: Instructions for your child's/children's homework assignments, and parent/child assignments are clear and understandable. More parents, 30% (12 parents), remained neutral on this topic. With the remaining responses to this question, 35% of the parents (14 parents) agreed that instructions were clear and understandable; 22.5% of the parents ( 9 parents) indicated

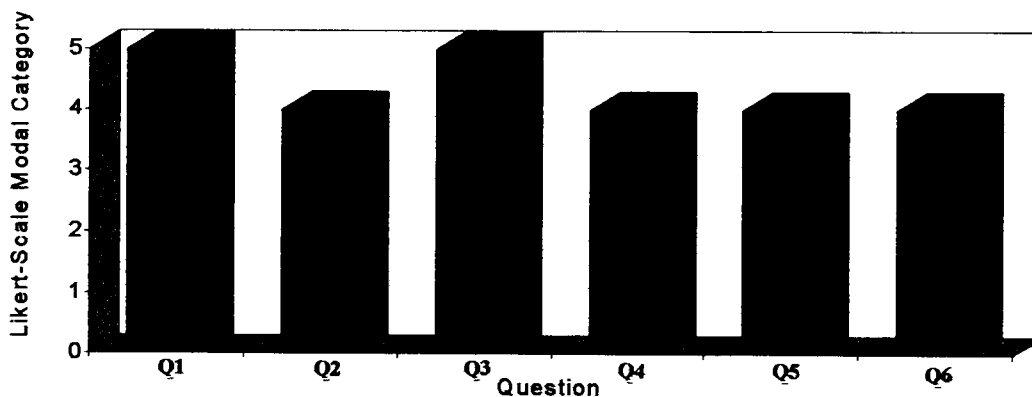


that they strongly agreed; 7.5% (3 parents) disagreed with this statement; while 5% of the participants (2 parents) strongly disagreed, believing that they were not receiving instructions for homework assignments that were clear and understandable.

The following graph, **Graph A**, gives an overall picture of the parent participant's responses to the first six questions on the parent survey, which looks at their perceptions of some of the basic factors in the parent-school partnership. In this graph, based on the data provided from forty parent participants, a modal category is shown that represents the mode (most frequently observed response) of the parent responses to that particular question. For example, Question 1, identifies that a response of strongly agree is the most frequently represented response (mode) from the parent participants to this specific question.

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**Graph A: Overall Parent Perceptions of the Parent-School Partnership between Parents and Teachers.**



- Q1: You actively participate in your child's/children's education?**  
**Q2: Your child's/children's teacher actively involves you in your child's/children's education?**  
**Q3: How comfortable are you in communicating with your child's/children's teacher?**  
**Q4: Overall, how satisfied are you with the level of information you receive regarding your child's/children's education?**  
**Q5: Overall, how satisfied are you with getting answers to the questions you have regarding your child's/children's education?**  
**Q6: Instructions for your child's/children's homework assignments, and parent/child assignments are clear and understandable.**
-

**School goals, curriculum, policy, programs and activities.** In the next set of four Likert-scale questions, parents were asked to identify if they believed they should have a role in volunteering at school; being an active member in developing school goals, curriculum, and school policies; and if the school should provide an array of activities and programs that involve students, parents, and teachers. All forty parent participants responded to these questions in the parent survey, therefore, n=40 in presenting the following results.

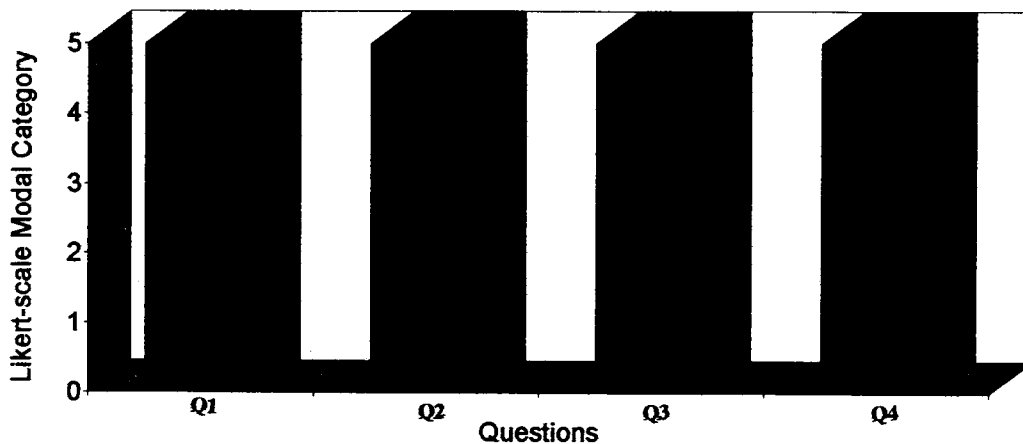
Overwhelmingly, parents indicated that they believed parents should be asked by the school for their input regarding school curriculum, school policies, and extra curricular activities and programs. Ninety-five percent of the parents ( 38 parents) responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Equal representation of 2.5 percent of parents (1 parent), were neutral, as well as disagreed with this statement. In relation to this question, parents were asked about involvement with the school in developing goals to improve parent involvement in the school. Overall, 92.5% of parents (37 parents) agreed with this statement; with 52.5% (21 parents) indicating that they strongly agreed, and 40% of parents (16 parents) indicating that they agreed. Pertaining to this question, 5% of the parents (2 parents) remained neutral; while 2.5% (1 parent) strongly disagreed.

When parents were surveyed on the inquiry that there should be many school activities and programs that involve students, parents, and teachers, 45% (18 parents) strongly agreed; 40% (16 parents) agreed; 12.5% of the parents (5 parents) remained neutral; and 2.5% of the parent participants (1 parent) disagreed. Although continuing to remain positive about parent involvement, more parents are also responding neutral to the more active, or advocacy role, within the school. When parents participants were asked in the survey if parents should be encouraged to volunteer in the school, 92.5% of the parent participants (37 parents) identified that they either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. The remaining 7.5% of the parent participants (3 parents) remained neutral. None of the forty parent participants disagreed with this statement.

**Graph B** highlights the mode of responses to each specific question in the second set of Likert-scale questions by presenting the question and the modal category for each question in this section of the parent survey. For example, Question 1, identifies that a response of strongly agree is the most frequently represented response (mode) from the parent participants.

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**Graph B: Overall Parent Perceptions Involving Parent Input and Roles**



**Q1: Parents should be asked by the school for their input regarding school curriculum, school policies, and extra curricular activities and programs?**

**Q2: Parents and families should be involved with the school in developing goals to improve parent involvement in the school?**

**Q3: There should be many school activities and programs that involve students, parents, and teachers, such as reading programs, social events, family workshops, field trips, speakers, etc.?**

**Q4: Parents should be encouraged to volunteer in the school?**

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Parent perceptions surrounding active participation in the school remained positive.

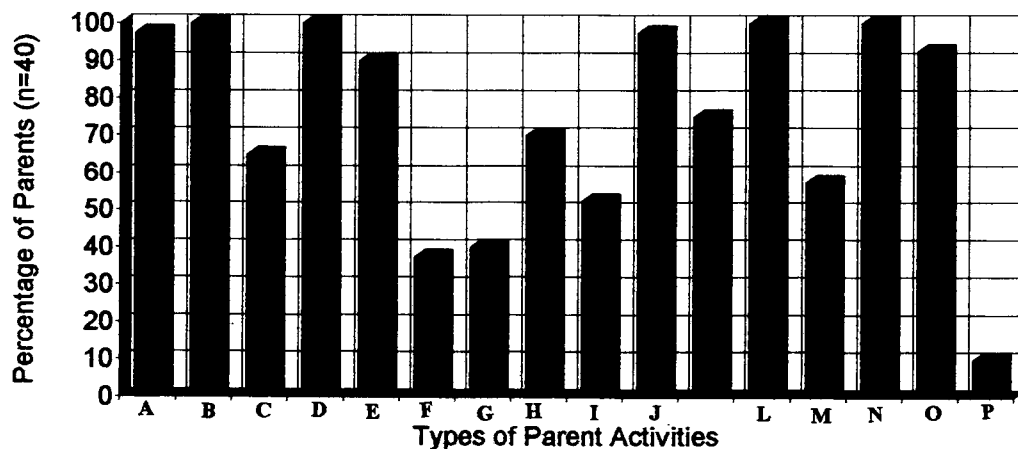
Overall, in the four areas shown in Graph B, parents strongly agreed that a parent's role with the school goes beyond making sure a child does her or his homework. At a different level, the parents who completed the survey, identified that parents should also be involved directly with the school from being a part of the decisions involving curriculum and policy, to volunteering and participating in extra-curricular activities.

**Parent roles.** The following graph, **Graph C**, uses the data from the parent survey to identify what roles parents are pursuing in actively participating in their child's education at Cambridge Elementary School. In this graph, titled, **Parent Roles and Participation**, the information on the horizontal axis describes the type of activity, based on the review of literature, and presented in the parent survey, that parents may pursue in being involved in a child's education. The vertical axis information represents the percentage (0-100%) of parents who marked each response as an activity they engage in. This was based on the responses of the forty parent participants (n=40) who completed the parent survey.

Through this check-list question, 100% of the parents (40 parents) identified that they engage in the following activities when it comes to a child's education: signs necessary school papers; attends school conferences; reads school newsletter and memos sent home with child; and reads with child at home. These activities are all very common, and quite typical, of the role many parents would expect to take in a child's education. The next two highly responded to activities involved parents doing homework with a child and parents supporting education at home. Thirty-nine (97.5%) parents marked these two activities regarding educational participation. With other forms of communication involving the school, 65% of the parents (26 parents) have phone contact with the teacher; 75% of the parents ( 30 parents) communicate their needs and interests regarding a child's education to teachers and other school personnel; and 57.5% of the parents ( 23 parents) initiate personal conferences regarding a child when he or she feels it is necessary (outside of regular conferences). At school 90% of the parents (36 parents) attend school sponsored activities; 37.5% of the parents (15 parents) attend school sponsored meetings; 40% of the parents ( 16 parents) volunteer at the child's school; 70% of the parents ( 28 parents) have lunch with a child at school; and 52.5% of parents ( 21 parents) visit a child's classroom. At home, 92.5% of parents survey ( 37 parents) said that they supervise when a child does his or her homework. All but one activity received a percentage of over 50% of the parents engaging in that particular level of participation.

Less than 50% of the parents surveyed identified that they attend school sponsored meetings.

**Graph C: Parent Roles and Participation**



- A: Do homework with my child**
- B: Sign necessary school papers**
- C: Have phone contact with teacher**
- D: Attend school conferences**
- E: Attend school activities**
- F: Attend school meetings**
- G: Volunteer at my child's school**
- H: Have lunch with my child at school**
- I: Visit my child's classroom**
- J: Support education at home**
- K: Communicate your needs and interests regarding your child's education to teachers and other school personnel**
- L: Read school newsletter and memos sent home with your child**
- M: Initiate personal conferences regarding my child when I feel it is necessary (outside of regular conferences)**
- N: Read with my child at home**
- O: Supervise my child when he or she does homework**
- P: Other**

In further explanation of the types of parent activities represented on **Graph C**, 10% of the parent participants (4 parents) added their input regarding other types of activities they have pursued in being actively involved in their child's education. These responses were calculated under the 'other' category of parent roles and activities. The

following list is a description of these responses under the category ‘other’:

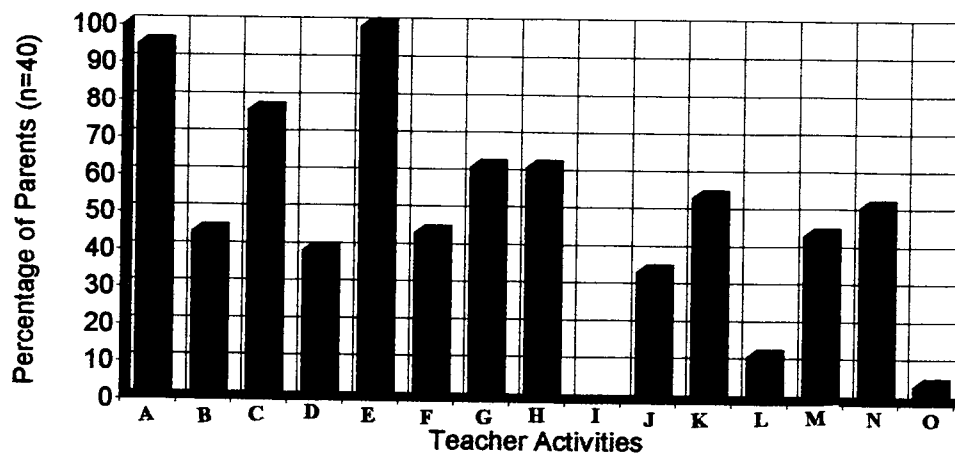
- Every child’s education starts at home.
- I talk to my children about math, science, and social studies.
- I help to get aides for my child.
- I check over my child’s work.
- I have had to advocate for my children at school when their best interests were compromised at school.
- I help to support and fundraise for better school equipment, computers, and playgrounds.

**Study time at home.** The parents who completed the survey were also asked to determine the amount of time, each week, that they spend with their child or children on school homework, learning, and practice. The following choices were listed regarding this individual question: less than 1 hour; 1-2 hours; 2.5-3.5 hours; 4-5 hours; and more than 5 hours. With 40 parent participants responding (n=40), the majority (32.5%) of the parents (13 parents), responded that they spend 4 to 5 hours per week with their child on school related learning and homework activity. Thirty percent of parents (12 parents) indicated that they spend 1-2 hours working with their child; 25% of parents (10 parents) who participated in the study spend 2.5 to 3.5 hours; and 12.5% of parents (5 parents) say they spend more than 5 hours with their child on school homework, learning, and practice. All of the parents who responded spend at least one hour of homework time with their child per week.

**Teacher roles.** The following graph, **Graph D**, uses the data from the parent survey to identify what roles teachers are taking in engaging and involving parents in a child’s education at Cambridge Elementary School. In this graph, titled, **Teacher Roles and Activities**, the information on the horizontal axis describes the type of activity, based on the review of literature, and presented in the parent survey, that teachers use to involve parents in a child’s education. The vertical axis information represents the percentage

(0-100%) of parents who marked each response as a role their child's teacher takes regarding the parent-school partnership. This was based on the responses of the forty parent participants (n=40) who completed the parent survey.

**Graph D: Teacher Roles and Activities**



- A: Memos and notices**
- B: Phone contact**
- C: Parent/child homework assignments**
- D: Invited on field trips**
- E: School conferences**
- F: Progress report (not report cards)**
- G: Communicates concerns that arise**
- H: Communicates child's achievements**
- I: Home visits to discuss child's progress**
- J: Invites you to come to your child's classroom**
- K: Communicates to you the activities your child is involved in, such as school projects, groups, and special classes in which your child may participate**
- L: Gives parent questionnaire so parent can evaluate their children's progress or provide some other forms of feedback**
- M: Teacher shares ideas and instructions with parents for monitoring or assisting their child at home in learning activities**
- N: Teacher presents as a resource person: loans books, materials, makes suggestions for home learning activities, ideas and suggestions on community resources**
- O: Other**

All forty parents (100%) identified that teachers use school conferences as a means of involving parents in a child's education. Respectively, school conferences are a mandatory event within the school system. In regards to the most popular and typical activities used to engage parents, 95% of the parents (38 parents) said that teachers use memos and

notices; 77.5% of parents ( 31 parents) indicated that teachers are using parent-child homework assignments; and 45% of parents (18 parents) indicated that teachers use phone contact to engage parents. Regarding communication, 45% of parents (18 parents) received progress reports about a child; 62.5% of parents ( 25 parents) talked with teachers about concerns that arose, as well as a child's achievement; and 55% of parents (22 parents) received information regarding the activities a child was involved in during school. Thirty-five percent of parents (14 parents) were invited to a child's classroom; 40% of parents ( 16 parents) were invited to go along on class field trips; 12.5% of parents (5 parents) were given questionnaires to evaluate a child's progress or provide some other forms of feedback; 45% of the parents (18 parents) responded that a child's teacher has shared ideas and instructions with parents for monitoring or assisting a child at home in learning activities; and 52.5% of the parents surveyed ( 21 parents) indicated that the child's teacher presents as a resource person for books, materials, making suggestions for home learning, as well as provides ideas and suggestions on community resources. None of the parents indicated that teachers visited the home to discuss a child's school progress.

To further explain the information on this graph, the category 'other' represented on **Graph C**, in which 5% of the parent participants (two parents) responded, are parent statements regarding teacher activities to involve parents in a child's education. These responses were calculated under the 'other' category of parent roles and activities. The following list is a description of these responses under the category 'other':

- "The teachers' communication has only been through conferences."
- "My child's teacher sends home a weekly classroom newsletter with the weeks activities."

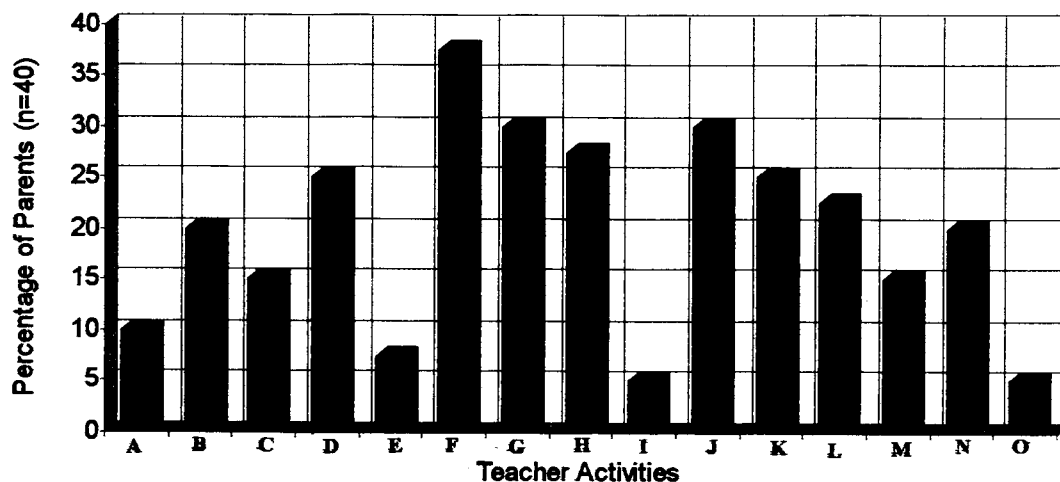
**Parent Needs.** After parent participants identified what activities their child's teacher engages in to involve parents, parents were also asked to distinguish what activities they (the parent) would like teachers to do that teachers are not currently doing, in an effort to



engage parents more in a child's education. **Graph E** represents these responses from parents. The horizontal information on the graph highlights the types of activities for teachers; while the vertical information signifies the percentage of parents (n=40) who chose that particular activity. The category 'other' was again used to provide parents an opportunity to write in other comments or activities regarding teacher roles.

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**Graph E: Parents' Needs for Teacher Practices**



- A: Memos and notices**
  - B: Phone contact**
  - C: Parent/child homework assignments**
  - D: Invited on field trips**
  - E: School conferences**
  - F: Progress report (not report cards)**
  - G: Communicates concerns that arise**
  - H: Communicates child's achievements**
  - I: Home visits to discuss child's progress**
  - J: Invites you to come to your child's classroom**
  - K: Communicates to you the activities your child is involved in, such as school projects, groups, and special classes in which your child may participate**
  - L: Gives parent questionnaire so parent can evaluate their children's progress or provide some other forms of feedback**
  - M: Teacher shares ideas and instructions with parents for monitoring or assisting their child at home in learning activities**
  - N: Teacher presents as a resource person: books, materials, makes suggestions for home learning activities, ideas and suggestions on community resources**
  - O: Other**
-

The category in which parents distinguished as being an activity they (the parent) would like teachers to use in engaging parent participation, was through the use of progress reports (not report cards). Fifteen parents (37.5%) marked this activity as a need for teacher practices. Twelve parents (30%) also highlighted that they would like teachers to communicate student concerns that arise, as well as inviting parents to come to the child's classroom; while 11 parents (27.5%) want teachers to communicate a child's achievements to the parent. Between 8 and 10 parents identified each of the following activities that they would like teachers to use to engage them in a child's education: phone contact (8 parents); parent-child homework assignments (6 parents); being invited to participate in class field trips (10 parents); communicate the activities a child participates in during school (10 parents); the teacher provides parent with a questionnaire to evaluate a child's progress or provide some other forms of feedback (9 parents); and the teacher presenting as a resource person for a parent through books, materials, ideas and suggestions, and knowledge regarding other community resources (8 parents). Six parents (15%) identified that they would like teachers to share ideas and instructions with them for monitoring or assisting a child at home in learning activities; four parents (10%) want teachers to use memos and notices to engage them in a child's education; three parents (7.5%) want teachers to continue to use school conferences to facilitate parent participation; and two parents (5%) would like teachers to use home visits as a means of involving a parent in a child's education.

In the category 'other' 5% of the parents (2 parents) identified the following two areas as activities parents would like teachers to do:

- Would like a weekly chart of specials programs and sharing.
- What areas my child might be good at and give it a try.

Some parents also listed several comments along side their responses to the questions that asked parents to highlight teacher activities and roles in the parent survey. The

following are comments parents wrote on the survey next to their responses:

- Would like more information regarding the Gifted and Talented Program; student progress and goals.
- Would like teachers to communicate with parents other times besides conferences.
- Would like to know about concerns immediately (first offense).
- Need for more help/ideas for behavioral issues, and for children with special needs.
- Would like to be able to attend field trips, but they usually limit the number of parents.
- Would feel more welcome if invited to come to my child's classroom.

**School programs.** Parent participants were asked a series of questions in the parent survey based on school programs and parent education. First of all, parents were asked if they would attend and participate in parent education programs. Out of the 34 parent participants who responded (n=34) to this question, 64.7% percent of the parents (22 parents) said that they would attend and participate in parent education programs; while 35.3% of parents (12 parents) said that they would not be involved in parent education programs. The parents who said that they would be involved in parent education programs suggested the following topics that they would be interested in:

- Classroom curriculum (reading, writing, arithmetic)
- Helping with homework
- Learning disabilities
- Discipline
- Creative parenting
- Teaching respect to children
- Children's self-esteem

Secondly, parents were asked if they would attend and participate in after-school, and other school sponsored events, programs, and parent/child activities. Thirty-nine parents responded to this question (n=39). The majority of the parents who responded to this question, 79.5% (31 parents) responded favorably, stating that they would participate in

different school sponsored events and activities. The remaining 8 parents (20.5%), indicated that they would not participate in other school sponsored events of activities. One parent commented on his or her interest for other programs and activities, which was an interest in theater and drama. These questions are represented in **Table 1, titled: Parent Education and School Sponsored Programs**, which lays out the parent responses to whether they do or not support parent education and school sponsored programs.

Thirdly, parents were asked: Do you support summer learning programs at home? Thirty-six parents chose to answer this question (n=36). In response to this question, 88.9% of parents (32 parents) said they did support summer learning programs at home; while 11.1% ( 4 parents) said that they did not support summer learning programs. In relation to this question, in which 38 parents responded (n=38), parents were then asked if they supported summer learning programs at school. The majority of parents, 89.5% (34 parents) said that they supported summer learning programs at school; while 10.5% of parents (4 parents) did not support summer learning programs at school. This information is represented in **Table 2, titled: Summer Learning Programs**, which lays out the parent responses regarding whether or not they support summer learning programs, albeit at home or at school.

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**Table 1: Parent Education and School Sponsored Programs**

<b>Would you attend and participate in parent education programs?</b>		
	parents (n=40)	
<b>YES</b>		<b>64.7%</b>
<b>NO</b>		<b>35.3%</b>
<b>Would you attend and participate in after-school sponsored events, programs, and parent/child activities?</b>		
	parents (n=40)	
<b>YES</b>		<b>79.5%</b>
<b>NO</b>		<b>20.5%</b>

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**Table 2: Summer Learning Programs**

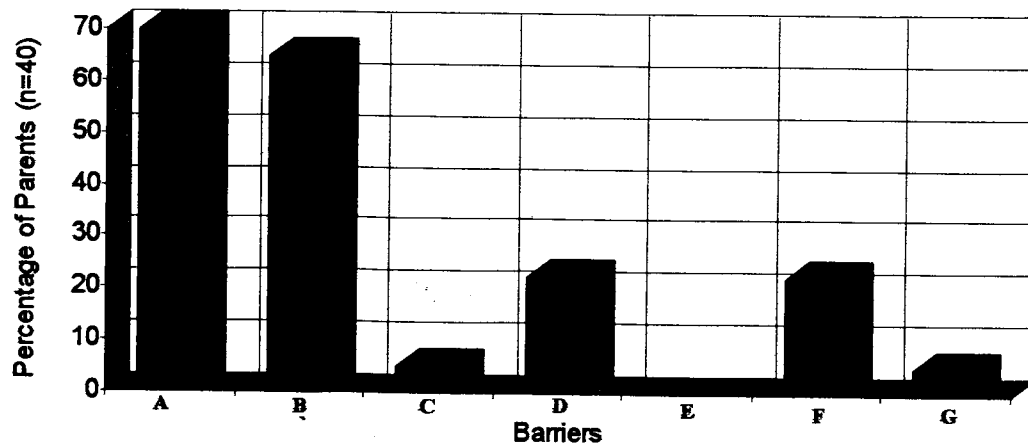
<b>Do you support summer learning programs at home?</b>		
	parents (n=40)	
YES		88.9%
NO		11.1%
<b>Do you support summer learning programs at school?</b>		
	parents (n=40)	
YES		89.5%
NO		10.5%

**Barriers.** An important factor in determining the level of school participation among parents, are the barriers, if any, that make it difficult for parents to establish an active engagement in their child's education. In the parent survey, parent participants were asked to identify, if any, the barriers that prevent them from actively participating in a child's education, parent workshops, or school sponsored events, programs, and other activities. The two largest factors that parents checked as barriers to participation (n=40) were work schedule (70% or 28 parents) and time constraints (65% or 26 parents). The following graph, **Graph F**, outlines other barriers that parents identified as obstacles to active school participation.

In the response set regarding the question of barriers, transportation was listed as a choice of barrier that prevents parents from actively participating in a child's education. None of the parent participants indicated that transportation was an issue for them. Two parents (5% of parents) indicated financial issues as a barrier; 9 parents (22.5%) indicated child care as a barrier; 9 parents (22.5%) indicated that types of events offered were a barrier; and 2 parents (5%) indicated that confidentiality was a barrier for them.

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**Graph F: Barriers to Parent Participation**



- A: Work Schedule**  
**B: Time Constraints**  
**C: Financial Issues**  
**D: Child Care**  
**E: Transportation**  
**F: Types of Events**  
**G: Confidentiality**

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Under the category 'other', parents listed the following issues and comments about barriers that remain obstacles in allowing them to actively participate in their child's education:

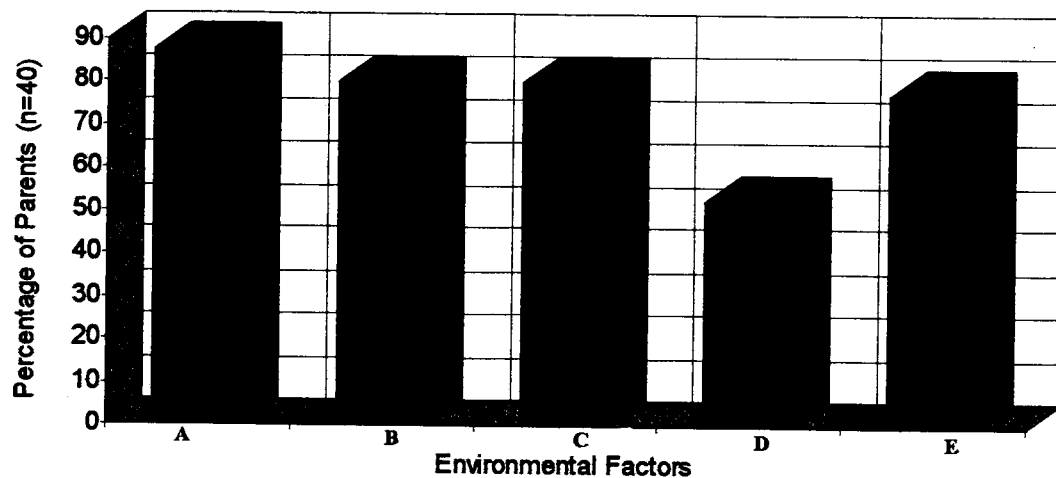
- More than one child with after school activities.
- Attend meetings 2-3 time per month at night.
- Too many activities already.
- Largest barrier is time; would like to be more involved but am spread too thin with four children and full time employment. We have placed too many demands on ourselves in today's society.

As the literature suggests, the school environment itself also plays an important role in engaging parents to come to school. Is the school a place where parents can communicate

openly and safely with school staff; feel comfortable about going to the school; take pride in their child's education; and know that the school is a place a parent can go to for resources and answers to questions. In the parent survey, the researcher asked parents to identify how Cambridge Elementary School provides a comfortable and safe environment in which a parent can be actively involved in a child's education. **Graph G** takes a look at these issues.

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**Graph G: School Environment**



- A: Friendly and helpful staff.**  
**B: The school and it's staff are accessible to you when you have questions, need resources, need to meet with someone, etc.**  
**C: Welcoming atmosphere (see school spirit, student/family focus is apparent, posters/pictures, clean environment).**  
**D: Adequate resources for you (books, materials, programs, activities, etc.).**  
**E: When you come to the school for a meeting, or other conference, you have the level of privacy and confidentiality you desire.**
- 

How does Cambridge Elementary School provide a comfortable and safe environment in which you are able to be actively involved in your child's education? With 40 parent participants responding to this question (n=40), 87.5% (35 parents) said that the staff at Cambridge Elementary are friendly and helpful; while 80% (32 parents) also indicated that the school and the staff are accessible when a parent has questions, needs resources, or needs to meet with someone. Eighty percent of parents (32 parents) responded that the

atmosphere within the school was indicative of school spirit, a student and family focus, and was clean. Regarding parent resources, 52.5% of parents (21 parents) said that the school does provide adequate resources for parents. Thirty-one parents (77.5%) also indicated that when they need to come to school for a meeting, or other conference, that they have the level of privacy and confidentiality they desire.

Out of the forty parent participants (n=40), each parent identified ways in which the school provided a comfortable and safe environment. Parents added other complimentary comments pertaining to the school's environment such as: the hands-on learning makes the learning fun; the school maintains an excellent library; that parents were happy with the policy of having visitors sign-in when at the front desk; that the teaching staff are accessible; and that it was pleasing that so many parents were involved in the school and volunteered. Of the forty parent participants (n=40), only 10% of the parents (4 parents) added negative feedback regarding the school environment. One parent commented on the uncleanliness of the bathrooms; while three parents stated that although they felt the teaching staff were helpful, friendly, and accessible, they did not feel the same way about the administrative staff.

At the end of the survey parents also had space in which they could provide other comments and/or suggestions regarding the parent-school partnership and active parent involvement. These parent comments, along with a more detailed discussion of the results described above, is provided in the next chapter. In the data provided through the parent surveys, the researcher looked for themes and regularities in identifying and understanding parents' views and roles in relation to their involvement in the parent-school partnership; as well as to identify what schools are doing to help foster this partnership, and what schools can do to help foster this parent-school partnership.



## DISCUSSION

Based on the parent survey completed for this research, several general themes emerge from the data collected: what parents envision parental involvement to be; parent roles and activity; teacher roles and activity; the role school environment plays in engaging parental involvement; and what barriers parent participants face in taking an active role in their child's education. Parent participants at Cambridge Elementary School strongly communicated that they are actively involved in their child's education; while at the same time indicating that the teachers are equally engaging parents in being an active member in this parent-school partnership (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989). As documented throughout the literature, parents have voiced a desire to be a partner in establishing school policy, programs, and curriculum standards and changes (Bowen, 1999). Parent participants at Cambridge Elementary parallel this research, saying they too, would like to have input regarding school curriculum, school policy, and other extra curricular activities and programs. Parent participants have also expressed a desire to have a role in developing goals with the school in how to help foster parent involvement within the school. Which, in the scheme of developing successful and long-standing goals and achievement, makes sense to work together for the benefit of all entities involved.

**Parent roles.** The research questions asks, What role are parents taking in fostering the parent-school partnership? There are several types of roles and involvement parents can pursue in working together with schools for the benefit of children. Involvement can be demonstrated through the basic obligations of families and of schools; through a more active role to engage and facilitate the parent-school partnerships; or through advocacy roles which involves participation in the decision making process at the school level (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Steinberg et al.,

1992). In response to the research question, What role are parents taking in fostering the parent-school partnership?, the data presented in this area establishes that sample parents at Cambridge Elementary are taking an active role in a child's education. At home, sample parents are doing homework with their child, supervising this homework time, as well as making time to read with their children. Out of 15 categories (not including the category 'other') which identified different parent activities and roles that parents can be engaged in (as seen in Graph C), only two of these parent role and participation categories received a less than 50% (15-16 parents) response from the parent participants. These two categories were attending school sponsored meetings (15 parents), and volunteering at a child's school (16 parents). What these data are saying, is that families are supporting education at home. Supporting education at home, is where educational values begin to form, and successful school achievement continues to flourish. This concept is replicated, as well, through some parent comments on the survey of personal revelations that, 'every child's education starts at home,' and 'I talk to my children about math, science, and social studies,' and 'I check over my child's work.' How much time parents spend at home working with their children on homework, learning, and practice, was fairly equally distributed between several amounts of time. All parents identified spending some time, at least one hour per week, on homework time. However, parents spent anywhere from 1-5 hours per week on homework time. Fewer parents, 12.5% (5 parents) spent more than 5 hours on homework per week. The question is, how much time is enough time? Perhaps the important ingredient here, is recognizing that parents *are* working with their child on homework, learning, and practice.

In working together with the school, parents are asserting that they are engaging and facilitating the parent-school partnership by signing the necessary school papers and reading pertinent newsletters and memos; and by attending school conferences, school activities, and other school meetings. Although less frequently, parents also use phone contact or initiate personal conferences regarding their child (outside of regular school

conferences), to pursue an active role in their child's education. This activity moves towards a more advocacy role regarding educational success. Over 70% of the parents (30 parents) are also being advocates for their child by communicating their needs and interests regarding a child's education to teachers and other school personnel, which is a key factor in helping children reach their potential at school and experience successful school achievement. As the literature reveals, open communication between parents and teachers reaps benefits in several venues; not just for student success, but in parents feeling more confident about their involvement with the school and parenting at home; and for teachers to feel comfortable in being able to work directly with parents. Other ways that parent participants revealed their role as advocates for their children were in helping their child get help at school when they believed it necessary; and in helping the school obtain better school equipment, computers, and playgrounds, which can enhance a child's growth and learning. Also reflective of the results is a parent's desire to be engaged in more of an advocacy role in school. This is also seen through the comments from parents that voice a hope to work more closely with administrative staff regarding school issues, other than just through parent organizations or fundraisers. This is also seen through a 95% (38 parents) response from parents of strongly agree or agree in regards to parents having input on school curriculum, policy, and other school programs. Parents want the administrative staff to work more positively and respectfully with the parent population regarding school issues that affect their children. A barrier that has been described through the review of literature, is the "separate" feeling between school administrators and parents. Some parents at Cambridge are saying this as well; and would like more say in what children are learning and what policies are being made.

Some issues that do not seem to parallel in regards to parent perception and parent action are: volunteering at school, and visiting the classroom or school. When parents were asked if they should be encouraged to volunteer in the school, 92.5% of parent participants (37 parents) either strongly agreed or agreed with this perception. However,

only about 40% of the parent participants (16 parents) acknowledged that they have volunteered at their child's school. Differing views were received from parents, from stating that they liked that Cambridge had so many volunteers, to wishing Cambridge Elementary had more parent volunteers. In relation to this, about 70% (28 parents) of the parents said that they go to the school to have lunch with their child; and just over 50% of the parents (21 parents) have visited their child's classroom.

Taken as a whole, these observations suggest that parents place value on being involved in their child's education, and is thus shown through the array of activities that parents engage in; as well as the perceptions that parents hold about the parent-school partnership. Although this particular research study does not delve into the more specific roles parents take at home, such as providing for the health and safety needs; developing parenting skills that prepare children for school and support healthy child development; and building positive home conditions that support school learning and appropriate behavior; one could make an assumption, because of the activities parents involve themselves in, that these roles, as well, are taking place at home. The review of literature has concluded that parental encouragement of reading, parent-child conversations on a multitude of topics, and displays of parental interest in a child's learning were among the home factors that were most predictive of academic learning (Bowen, 1999).

**Teacher roles.** How do teachers involve parents in a child's education? The basic obligations of schools are to communicate with families through memos, notices, phone calls, report cards, and conferences (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1992). Over 90% of the 40 parent participants (38 parents) indicated that teachers are using memos, notices, and school conferences to communicate with parents. The data also asserts that less than 50% of parents (18 parents) identified that teachers use phone contact to communicate with parents and families. These initiatives are important aspects in establishing constructive parent-school relationships. Although teachers are not using phone contact as frequently as written

resources or regularly scheduled school conferences, parents have identified that teachers are communicating concerns that arise, and communicating about a child's achievement. Home visits are not being used as a means of communicating more personally with families.

Epstein (1991) recognized that although families and schools share in the responsibility for student achievement, that schools have the resources and ability to empower parents to take an active role in their child's education. Parent participants showed teachers taking these steps in several different ways:

- parent/child homework assignments
- parents are invited on field trips
- teachers using progress reports, other than report cards
- inviting parents to come to the classroom
- communicates to parents the different activities/programs/classes a child is involved in
- gives parent a questionnaire so parent can evaluate their child's progress or provide some other forms of feedback
- teacher shares ideas and instructions with parents for monitoring or assisting their child at home in learning activities
- teacher presents as a resource person: loans books, materials, makes suggestions for other home learning strategies and activities
- teacher sends home a weekly classroom newsletter with the weeks activities.

Most frequently used by teachers, as identified by 70% of sample parents (31 parents), was the use of parent/child homework assignments.

In what ways would parents like teachers to involve them that the teacher is not currently doing? Parents have expressed concern that teachers tend to communicate only during regular school conferences; and although parents have indicated that teachers use an array of different approaches to engage parents in a child's education, parents have also acknowledged that they would like more frequent utilization of the same types of efforts.

What tends to stand out the most, is that over 35% of parents (15 parents) pointed out the need to obtain progress reports about their child outside of report cards or regularly scheduled conferences. Five percent of parents (2 parents) also conveyed a desire for home visits from their child's teacher. It is evident that parents want more information from teachers regarding progress, concerns, school programs, and school activities. Personal comments from some parents also reflect the desire to be included more in a child's educational activities through invitations to the classroom and on field trips.

These findings seem to suggest that parents often look to teachers to initiate that partnership with the school. In fact, the literature conveys that a teacher's attitude and judgment of parents and students, as well as a teacher's role in engaging parent involvement, are important variables in completely comprehending how parents gain knowledgeable and growing partnerships with schools (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991). Parents often have a fear of trying to connect with teachers and schools, and therefore do not feel comfortable in making that initial step to work together with their child's teacher or other school personnel. Parents oftentimes need guidance in knowing how to become active in their child's education and becoming partners with their child's teacher (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1994). Two steps in achieving this partnership are through school programs, and teacher practices in establishing family and school connections (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Smrekar, 1996; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

**Barriers.** Are there any barriers that prevent parents from actively fostering the parent-school partnership? The review of literature revealed a myriad of barriers that can inhibit parents from taking an active role in a child's education and maintaining a positive partnership with teachers and other school related programs. Interestingly, parents who participated in this research study, strongly identified two barriers to active parent involvement: work schedule (28 parents) and time constraints (26 parents), which could go hand-in-hand. Child care and types of events presented just over 20% (n=40) of parent

indicators to obstacles; and less than 10% of parents identified that financial issues and confidentiality contributed to a parent's inability to pursue an active parent-school partnership with Cambridge Elementary. Personal accounts of time constraints due to meetings, work, number of children, and other responsibilities signifies the degree to which parents signaled time as a barrier in actively participating in a child's education. One parent soundly expressed that he or she is "spread too thin with four children and full time employment. We have placed too many demands on ourselves in today's society." So when one looks closely at the data, and identifying that fewer parents come to the school, but have a more active role at home, it seems very reflective of the fact that parents and families just do not have enough hours in the day to fulfill the active parent role with the school, as they express they would like to do.

**Limitations and strengths.** The findings are limited by the facts that the sample size consisted of forty parent participants, when Cambridge Elementary School enrolls approximately 890 students. With so many families and differing family systems, and with so many teachers and different teaching styles and classroom dynamics, it is unknown how the other 60 parents who did not return the survey would have responded. This reduces the generalizability of this survey to the whole parent population at Cambridge Elementary School. This is a single study that involves a limited view of demographics, which did not explore the more basic obligations from at home. The basic obligations at home entail a family's role in providing for a child's health and safety needs; developing parenting skills that prepare children for school and support healthy child development; and building a positive home conditions that support school learning and appropriate behavior. Although Cambridge includes some multi-age classrooms in which students can have the same teacher for two years, not all students participate in these programs. Thus, a parent's experience can change from year to year, altering their perceptions and roles from year to year as well. Also, this study reflects a parent's point of view in the parent-school

partnership, and does not reflect the personal accounts of teachers who are the other players in this working relationship.

Regardless of the size of the research sample, it does begin to provide some information in respect to the parent-school partnership: parent roles, needs, and barriers in active parent participation. The data collected identifies what parents want more of from teachers, what they appreciate from teachers, and what other strategies would be helpful for parents in knowing and understanding more about a child's education and learning. An anonymous survey, such as this, can provide a more comfortable means of voicing concerns and needs, without compromising anyone's right to privacy, experiences, or relationship between the parent and the school. Another strength of this study is the use of both qualitative and quantitative data. The use of open-ended questions on the parent survey allowed parent participants to identify their own unique needs, ideas, and interests pertaining to parent participation.

**Recommendations.** Overall, the study of forty parent participants suggests that both parents and teachers are working to foster the parent-school partnership at Cambridge Elementary School, by engaging in activities that enhance a more active working relationship. The majority of the parent participants conveyed a positive view of the school, its teachers, and their experience within this educational environment. Based on these findings, parents want more communication with teachers about their child's education, and they want to be a more influential piece in making educational decisions involving goal development, school policy, school programs, and school activities.

These findings would be beneficial for both teachers and administrative staff in recognizing areas in which they could be more accessible. Parents were open about what they want and need from teachers, which could be used to help teachers design and implement strategies that would help them be more effective in building a rapport with families and in engaging families to be more active in a child's education. Administrative staff can also use these findings to advance steps in maintaining and achieving goals



directed towards involving and working with parents on a level that they themselves desire. It does not seem complete for parents to be included in organizations and programs or to be invited, but to also have support and respect in having a voice in educational issues.

To accommodate the multifaceted changes that take place in families, communities, and schools, it would be recommended that schools continue to evolve in identifying parent needs through the use of surveys from year to year. Financial limitations and time restricted the sample size, and the school could reach the larger population, therefore obtaining a more accurate view of the role, needs, and barriers, of parent participation. With 60% of the parent participants (60 parents) not returning the survey, it is not known how these 60 parents would have responded regarding parent participation in a child's education. While an effort was made to be random in this sample of parents, not every parent who had a child enrolled at Cambridge Elementary School had an equal chance to receive this study survey. In reaching the larger population of parents, more significant findings could be obtained, and used as a basis for developing more accurate goals regarding parent participation. Because parents have emphasized a lack of time to be a significant barrier, as is probably felt by teachers as well, school can work to identify alternative methods to communicate with parents, perhaps through technological support such as the use of parent phone lines or hot-lines.

The school setting plays an instrumental role in renewing the sense of community that has been lost. Building social capital for families and for the community can be done within an environment that fosters growing and learning: the school. The benefits of a strong parent-school partnership are empowering for families, children, and teachers (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Powell, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Olmsted, 1991; Schaefer, 1991; Yanok & Derubetis, 1989).

**Implications for social work practice.** School social workers, or other support personnel, often bring families and schools together in providing adequate information and services for problem-solving, and enhancing a family's educational experience. Parents and teachers alike, often find it difficult to initiate contact, and school social workers can be a partner in helping foster this relationship. Recognizing and understanding the need of parents and teachers is a significant tool in creating a positive relationship and building a successful future for families and school; and for fostering the healthy growth and development of children. School social workers are often more aware of the barriers that prevent families from actively participating in a child's education; and can be a critical link in bridging the parent-school partnership, and creating steps that move from problem identification to a more problem-solving vision.

**Further research.** A countless number of variables exist within families, schools, and communities. Thus, further exploration is needed to separate and explore these variables in order to interpret and accurately represent the various types of families and school systems. Further research could examine the cultural facets of parent-school partnerships, in identifying the communication exchange and needs of families who are not responded to adequately. This can include not only cultural groups, but for example, how to reach fathers or single parent families more. In identifying general barriers to the parent-school partnerships, further research could identify more specific barriers which hinder involvement in the school, and seek to identify alternative means of involvement. With so many schools working with so many different kinds of elements, be it financial, cultural, programmatic, or other facets, there is a need for schools to develop teams that work specifically with identifying these multifaceted issues and brainstorming alternative ways in which to reach families by the means in which they possess.

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**Appendix A - #1  
School Consent Letter**

CES  
**Cambridge Elementary School**  
310 North Elm ~ Cambridge, MN 55008  
Phone (612) 689-1670 ~ Fax (612) 689-1670

January 25, 1999

Lucie Ferrell, R.N., Ph.D., Chair  
Augsburg College Institutional Review Board  
2211 Riverside Avenue, Campus Mail #118

Re: Bethany Jarvis

Dear Dr. Ferrell:

I am writing to you on behalf of Bethany Jarvis, MSW graduate student at Augsburg College. Bethany is completing her field placement at Cambridge Elementary School and she will be conducting a research study at the school titled, The Parent-School Partnership: Exploring the Role, Needs, and Barriers, of Parent Participation. The goal of this research is to help identify the needs and barriers that parents have in working with the school to foster the parent-school partnership; and to provide a basis for developing goals for parents and teachers in working together.

Bethany has my permission to use the school directory of students' parents for the population of parents to participate in the study.

You may call me (689-1670) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Chuck Niles

Principal

**Appendix A - #2**  
**Parent Consent Letter**

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**The Parent-School Partnership:  
Exploring the Role, Needs, and Barriers of Parent Participation  
IRB #99-11-2**

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March 3, 1999

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student in the Master of Social Work program at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, MN. I am also doing my internship at Cambridge Elementary doing School Social Work. For my thesis, I am researching parent participation in the school: how parents involve themselves in the school, what needs they have from teachers, and any barriers that may exist for families that hinder their involvement in schools. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you have a child or children enrolled in Cambridge Elementary School. This research study has been approved by and is being done in cooperation with Cambridge Elementary School. I ask that you read this form very carefully.

**Background Information**

This research study is being conducted to provide me with information for my Master of Social Work thesis and to provide you with an opportunity to identify your needs in working together with the school; and to provide a basis for developing goals for parents and teachers that will help foster the parent-school partnership.

**Voluntary Nature of this Study**

Your experience and opinions are important. It is up to you whether or not to participate in this research study. Your decision will not affect your current or future relations with Cambridge Elementary School or Augsburg College.

**Procedures and Anonymity**

I am surveying 100 parents of children who are enrolled in Cambridge Elementary School. **Participation in this research is anonymous and voluntary.** I do not know your name. Your anonymity is protected as Cambridge Elementary is mailing out this questionnaire. The surveys do not ask or present any identifying information. Only the researcher has access to the surveys collected. Completed and returned questionnaires will be filed in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home and will be destroyed by September 30, 1999. Information from this questionnaire will be used for my thesis and will be shared with Cambridge Elementary School in summarized form only.



**Risks of Participating in this Study**

By completing this questionnaire you are being asked to communicate private information regarding your involvement with Cambridge Elementary and you may be reminded of feelings or experiences associated with Cambridge Elementary School. You may choose to skip any questions that are uncomfortable for you to answer. **Your decision to skip a question will not affect your participation in this study.**

**Benefits of Being a Participant in this Study**

While there are no direct benefits to participating in this research study, this is an opportunity to communicate your needs in working together with Cambridge Elementary School. Your participation in this study will help parents, teachers, and community agencies identify the needs and barriers that face parents in actively participating in their child's/children's education; and provide a basis for developing goals that will help foster this parent-school partnership.

Please help in this research study by completing and returning the enclosed questionnaire. This questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. **Once completed, please return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope provided, by March 17, 1999.**

**Completing and returning this questionnaire indicates your consent to participate in this research.**

**Thank you for considering your participation in this research study. If you have any questions regarding this research study, please feel free to contact me at Cambridge Elementary School (612-689-1670) or at TSA (320-629-7600); Charles Niles, Principal at Cambridge Elementary School (612-689-1670); or Dr. Sharon Patten, my thesis advisor at Augsburg College (612-330-1723).**

**Please keep this copy for your records.**

**Thank You!**

Sincerely,

Bethany Jarvis

Graduate Student and Researcher

## Appendix B - Parent Survey

### INSTRUCTIONS

Most of the questions in this survey can be answered by circling the response that best describes your answer, or by checking the box next to the choices given. Please base your responses on your current involvement with Cambridge Elementary School. This survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. One parent may fill out the survey. If you have more than one child enrolled in Cambridge Elementary School, please answer the following questions in terms of your overall involvement with the school.

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\*After reading the statement given choose the answer that best represents your belief. If you believe that you are Neutral, that you neither agree nor disagree, circle 3. Please **circle the number, not the words**. The higher the degree you feel you agree, the higher the number you should choose.

**For example:**

A. I support education. (Circle one below)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

\*After reading the statement given check the box or boxes that apply to you by placing an **X in the box**.

**For example:**

B. What makes it difficult to attend after-school activities? \*Please check all that apply:

☐ Work    ☐ Time    ☐ Financial    ☐ Child Care

\*For some questions you will have the following choices:

☐ None    ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**\*If you chose Other, please specify by writing in your answer in print.**

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Your comments and suggestions are welcome and appreciated. There is space provided for you at the end of this survey for your comments. Your responses to this survey will be helpful in letting teachers know what your needs and interests are as a parent in regards to your child's education. **Your decision to skip a question will not affect your participation in this study.**

We appreciate your willingness to complete this survey. **Please do not write names on this survey or other personal information that would identify you and your family. This survey is anonymous. No one will know who has answered and returned the questionnaire.**

**\*BY COMPLETING AND RETURNING THIS SURVEY, YOU ARE GIVING YOUR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY.**

**A. For each of the following statements and questions, please choose the response that best represents your answer by circling the appropriate number.**

1. You actively participate in your child's/children's education?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Your child's/children's teacher actively involves you in your child's/children's education?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. How comfortable are you in communicating with your child's/children's teacher?

Very Uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Neutral	Comfortable	Very Comfortable
1	2	3	4	5

4. Overall, how satisfied are you with the level of information you receive regarding your child's/children's education?

Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5

5. Overall, how satisfied are you with getting answers to the questions you have regarding your child's/children's education?

Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5

6. Instructions for your child's/children's homework assignments, and parent/child assignments are clear and understandable.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

**B. For each of the following statements and questions, please choose the response that best represents your answer by circling the appropriate number.**

1. Parents should be asked by the school for their input regarding school curriculum, school policies, and extra curricular activities and programs?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Parents and families should be involved with the school in developing goals to improve parent involvement in the school?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. There should be many school activities and programs that involve students, parents, and teachers, such as reading programs, social events, family workshops, field trips, speakers, etc.?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. Parents should be encouraged to volunteer in the school?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

**C. For the following statements, please mark an X in the box that applies to you. Check ALL that apply.**

1. A. Overall, in which ways do you currently participate in your child's education:

- ☐ Do homework with my child.
- ☐ Sign necessary school papers.
- ☐ Have phone contact with teacher.
- ☐ Attend school conferences.
- ☐ Attend school activities.
- ☐ Attend school meetings.
- ☐ Volunteer at my child's school.
- ☐ Have lunch with my child at school.
- ☐ Visit my child's classroom.
- ☐ Support education at home.
- ☐ Communicate your needs and interests regarding your child's education to teachers and other school personnel.
- ☐ Read school newsletter and memos sent home with your child.
- ☐ Initiate personal conferences regarding my child when I feel it is necessary (outside of regular conferences).
- ☐ Read with my child at home.
- ☐ Supervise my child when he or she does homework.
- ☐ Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Check the box that applies.**

1. B. How much time each week do you spend with your child/children on school homework, learning, and practice?

[ ] less than 1 hour    [ ] 1-2 hours    [ ] 2.5 - 3.5 hours    [ ] 4 - 5 hours    [ ] more than 5 hours

2. Overall, in what ways does your child's/children's current teacher involve you in your child's education: **Check all that apply.**

- ☐ Memos and notices.
- ☐ Phone contact.
- ☐ Parent/child homework assignments.
- ☐ Invited on field trips.
- ☐ School conferences.
- ☐ Progress Reports (not report cards).
- ☐ Communicates concerns that arise.
- ☐ Communicates child's achievement.
- ☐ Home visits to discuss your child's progress.
- ☐ Invites you to come to your child's classroom.
- ☐ Communicates to you the activities your child is involved in, such as school projects, groups, and special classes in which your child may participate.
- ☐ Gives parent questionnaire so parent can evaluate their children's progress or provide some other forms of feedback.
- ☐ Teacher shares ideas and instructions with parents for monitoring or assisting their child at home in learning activities.
- ☐ Teacher presents as a resource person: loans books, materials, makes suggestions for home learning activities, ideas and suggestions on community resources.
- ☐ Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. In what ways would you like your child's/children's teacher to involve you that he or she is not currently doing? **Check all that apply.**

- ☐ Memos and notices.
- ☐ Phone contact.
- ☐ Parent/child homework assignments.
- ☐ Invited on field trips.
- ☐ School conferences.
- ☐ Progress Reports (not report cards).
- ☐ Communicates concerns that arise.
- ☐ Communicates child's achievement.
- ☐ Home visits to discuss your child's progress.
- ☐ Invites you to come to your child's classroom.
- ☐ Communicates to you the activities your child is involved in, such as school projects, groups, and special classes in which your child may participate.
- ☐ Gives parent questionnaire so parent can evaluate their children's progress or provide some other forms of feedback.
- ☐ Teacher shares ideas and instructions with parents for monitoring or assisting their child at home in learning activities.
- ☐ Teacher presents as a resource person: loans books, materials, makes suggestions for home learning activities, ideas and suggestions on community resources.
- ☐ Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4.a. Would you attend and participate in parent education programs: [ ] Yes [ ] No

b. Specify topics of interest: \_\_\_\_\_

5. a. Would you attend and participate in after-school school sponsored events, programs, and parent/child activities: [ ] Yes [ ] No

b. Specify interests: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you support summer learning programs at home? [ ] Yes [ ] No

7. Do you support summer learning programs at school? [ ] Yes [ ] No

8. What barriers prevent you from actively participating in your child's education, parents workshops, or school sponsored events, programs, and other activities. **Please check all that apply.**

☐ Work schedule

☐ Time constraints

☐ Financial issues

☐ Child Care

☐ Transportation

☐ Types of events

☐ Confidentiality

☐ Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

9. How does Cambridge Elementary School provide a comfortable and safe environment in which you are able to be actively involved in your child's/children's education? **Please check ALL that apply to you; if you have specific comments to add, please specify by writing on the line following the statement.**

☐ Friendly and helpful staff. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ The school and it's staff are accessible to you when you have questions, need resources, need to meet with someone, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Welcoming atmosphere (see school spirit; student/family focus is apparent; posters/pictures; clean environment). \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Adequate resources for you (books, materials, programs, activities, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

☐ When you come to the school for a meeting, or other conference, you have the level of privacy and confidentiality that you desire. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Other (Please Specify). \_\_\_\_\_

☐ None of the above. Please explain. \_\_\_\_\_

**End of Survey. Thank you for your time. I appreciate your help in building a positive parent/school partnership for the benefit of our students, families, and teachers!**

**Comments/Suggestions:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### INNOVATIVE IDEAS FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

**Grade Level Sessions** - Individual teachers or groups of teachers from the same grade level invite parents to an educational event especially for the parents of the students in a particular grade. This even might cover instruction on the computers their children are using in school; an introduction to a series of home-learning activities for use with their children; handling negative peer pressure, discipline, drugs; and learning about grade level curriculum.

**Meet With the Principal** - Principals host monthly or bimonthly luncheons in the school cafeteria. These luncheons let parents engage in informal conversations with the principal and each other and can be organized school wide, by grade level, or by interest areas such as arts, special needs students, and advisory councils. Principals can also hold open hours when any parent can drop into their office.

**Breakfast With the Teacher** - Invite parents to bring their children to school on a selected day and stay for an informal potluck breakfast. Parent volunteers help teachers organize these breakfasts which give parents an opportunity to meet with the teacher and with each other.

**Neighborhood Coffees** - Neighborhood coffees organized jointly by school staff and parents are held in home, community centers, or other convenient locations. Some parents feel more comfortable meeting there then in schools. These get-togethers are designed to give a small group of parents an informal opportunity to talk with school staff about issues affecting their children. For example, neighborhood coffees might be organized for parents of sixth-grade children who will soon be going to junior high to share ideas on helping them with this important transition.

**School-Based Literacy and Family Nights** - Literacy and other adult basic education programs are offered in schools with activities for children, such as homework tutoring and recreational activities, available at the same time.

**Enrichment Programs** - School work with adult education agencies to conduct enrichment programs designed for parents with limited English proficiency. These programs include workshops for skill development, field trips that provide educational experiences, and other special events.

**English as a Second Language Adult Education Programs** - These programs coordinate the education of parents with the education of their children. Materials used for English as a Second Language and literacy training are also used by children in their classrooms.

Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, August 1996.

## **Appendix D**

### **TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORT AT HOME**

Schools can contact the national Read\*Write\*Now! Program to match children with adults who will read together regularly with them. 1-800-USA-LEARN.

**Voice Mail** - Telephone answering systems that permit teachers to record homework assignments and suggestions to parents for home learning; as well as giving parents an opportunity to leave messages when they need assistance.

**Computer Lending Libraries** - Students and parents can take home personal computers and software, or schools can offer family classes on computing.

**Hotlines-Cable TV** - Help with homework or other school related concerns to students and parents through telephone hotlines staffed by teachers and "homework hours" on cable TV.

**Monthly Satellite Town Meetings** - Satellite Town Meetings on education are co-sponsored by the National Alliance of Business. These interactive meetings give individuals the chance to share ideas about improving education with other Americans in communities all across the nation. 1-800-USA-LEARN.

**Community Update** - Newsletters that are monthly publications which provide current information on education news, including family involvement activities, and that also provide information on what other communities are doing to make schools better. 1-800-USA-LEARN.

Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, August 1996.



## **APPENDIX E**

### **Parent-School Programs**

#### **1. The Parent Program (Comer & Haynes, 1991)**

A program was created on the basis of parent involvement in three levels: Level 3, general participation; Level 2, helping in the classrooms or sponsoring and supporting school programs; and Level 1, parents elected by the parent group to participate on the School Planning and Management Team.

Level one involves the most crucial level of parental involvement. A small group of parents (five or six), are elected by their peers to represent them on the School Planning and Management Team. These elected parents work with teachers, professional and nonprofessional support staff representatives, and the principal of the school. These parents also work with the parent group to develop activities in support of the extensive school plan. One of the goals is for these parents to seek out other parents and encourage them to actively participate in activities and decision making processes. Because parents are a natural connection to the communities in which schools are located, this provides valuable knowledge to the school and community professionals. Parents bring their knowledge, perspectives, and are a voice to the needs of the community as well as families. Parents' own experiences with their children is yet another valuable asset to teachers, in helping to provide age-appropriate and culturally appropriate activities and programs to the classroom.

Through this parent program, a Share Night was subsequently planned during which several community service providers discussed the kinds of services available to parents and how to use them.

During this program it was at times difficult for parents to actively participate in this program due to a conflict between their work schedules and the designated meeting times. In response to this situation, the principal contacted employers, explaining the program and the importance of active parent involvement. The principal requested that parent members be given time off to attend such meetings. The employers agreed. In other schools with this problem, team members have agreed to meet before or after school or in the evenings

Level 2 involvement includes parent involvement in day-to-day classroom and school activities and joining an existing parent organization. School calendar activities are sponsored together by parents and staff. The activities that the schools carry out often include field trips, assemblies, parties, art and athletic programs. These activities are made a part of the school calendar and carried out with social and academic goals for each one.

The parents and staff work together in thinking through, establishing and achieving these goals. Parent assistants who demonstrated leadership qualities were frequently elected by the parent group to represent them on the School Planning and Management Team. In some workshops offered by the school for parents, staff members explained the academic program of the school and how parents can actively be involved in helping their children learn. During these workshops, parents also made presentations about their lives, hobbies, and goals. Child development experts and subject-area consultants also made presentations with and for parents and staff.

At this level of involvement the school also developed a program entitled "Social Skills Curriculum for Inner-City Children." This program was designed to give children similar experiences to those that others gained at home. Parents and staff worked together to review the needs, and developed a program that gave the children experiences in four areas: politics and government, business and economics, health and nutrition, spiritual and leisure time. This curriculum integrated the teaching of academic skills with the teaching of social skills and appreciation of the arts. Community leaders were also involved in making presentations in the classroom. This curriculum was offered during elective time, so as not to interfere with standard academic programs.

Level 3 involved parents on the basic level of parent participation in the school. This includes attending various programs and activities, such as holiday programs, athletic games, band and choir performances, etc. The School Planning and Management Team often creates other programs to involve parents. For example, one school developed a Fathers' Breakfast.

## **2. School Development Program (Comer & Haynes, 1991)**

This program contains three mechanisms, three operations, and three guidelines. The key program element is a governance mechanism (School Planning and Management Team) that is representative of all the adult stakeholders in the school: parents, teachers, administrators, professional support staff (special education teacher, social worker, psychologist, and any other such person in the building), and nonprofessional support staff (clerk, custodian, others).

The above mentioned team carries out three critical management operations: development and implementation of a comprehensive school plan that focuses on both the school climate and the academic program, staff development based on the plan, and assessment and modification of the school program as indicated. The second mechanism is a Mental Health Team that addresses developmental and behavioral needs of students and simultaneously and systematically shares team members' knowledge, skills, and sensitivity in the areas of child development and relationships with classroom teachers and administrators. The third mechanism is the Parent Program, which focuses initially and primarily on supporting the social program of the comprehensive school plan and then on the academic program as needed. The social program is designed to enable parents and

staff together to aid the social development of students and to motivate them to achieve well both social and academically.

Three important program guidelines are generated first in the School Planning and Management Team, and they permeate the work of the school: a "no-fault," problem-solving approach; consensus decision making based on child development principles; and collaborative management that does not paralyze the school principal.

### **3. Minnesota Initiative in Family Support and Education (Powell, 1991)**

The department of education in Minnesota launched parent-focused programs for families with children under the age of 6 years. The programs are not targeted to specific types of families due to the public education tradition of providing universal services, the desire to avoid any possible stigma that might be inherent in a targeted program, and the need to secure broad political support in order to pass the legislation for the programs.

There are long waiting lists of mostly middle-class parents who are eager to utilize program services. School districts have found it difficult to divert resources from these programs to serve less advantaged populations in need of more intensive and comprehensive services. One possible route out of this bind is to require universal programs to make special efforts in a community to recruit populations that are considered to be undeserved.

### **4. Missouri Initiatives in Family Support and Education (Powell, 1991).**

The department of education in Missouri launched parent-focused programs for families with children under the age of 6 years. The programs are not targeted to specific types of families due to the public education tradition of providing universal services, the desire to avoid any possible stigma that might be inherent in a targeted program, and the need to secure broad political support in order to pass the legislation for the programs.

### **5. The Kentucky Family Services Coordinator (Smrekar, 1996)**

The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 established a system for statewide coordination of child-serving agencies through a school-based collaborative arrangement. Family resource centers (to serve children up to age 12) and youth services centers (to serve children age 12 and older) are charged with developing relationships and program linkages among agencies that serve children and families, including social services, mental health workers, juvenile justice, and colleges and universities. The Kentucky plan called for a statewide involvement through the public school system.

The legislation specifically called for the Family Resource Coordinators to connect families with the services necessary to meet basic needs, including: full-time child care for children ages 2-3 years; after-school child care for children ages 4-12 years; health and

education services for new and expectant parents; education to enhance parenting skills; support and training for child day-care providers; and health services or referrals.

The average grant in 1993-94 was \$71,500. Centers are staffed by a center coordinator with the assistance of an advisory council comprising of parents, school staff, community members, and service providers. Most centers allocate a portion of their grant to fund additional part- or full-time staff, including a clerk/receptionist or a family services specialist.

#### **6. Cooperative Communication Between Home and School (Cochran & Dean, 1991)**

This program includes an in-service program for teachers, materials for school administrators, and a workshop series for parents. In the in-service training program, teachers learn how to empathize with parents and recognize their strengths, make the most of parent-teacher conferences, and find creative ways to involve parents in school activities. At the same time, special attention is given to helping classroom teachers appreciate their own strengths and work together in support of one another. In the parents' workshops, parents develop a greater appreciation for the challenges faced by their children's teachers and learn communication skills, effective parent-teacher conferencing techniques, and problem solving.

#### **7. K-3 Follow Through Program (Binford & Newell, 1991; Olmsted, 1991)**

This program supplemented the school achievement of students who had participated in head Start. This model is primarily a home-involvement model, developing a home-school learning cycle that has four major components:

1. A planning session with a classroom teacher and a parent educator for the development of a home-learning activity appropriate for the child and paralleling classroom learning.
2. A presentation of the home-learning activity by the parent educator to the mother and a discussion of relevant desirable teaching behaviors.
3. Role-playing by the parent educator and mother in the presentation of the selected home-learning activity.
4. A debriefing session by the parent educator and teacher to assess the effectiveness of the home-learning activity and to share suggestions and projects developed by the parent and growing out of the planned home-learning activity.

#### **8. ANCHOR (Addressing the Needs of Children Through Observation and Response) Project (Kasting, 1994)**

The ANCHOR Project centers around parent and educator observation and discussion of videotaped sequences of children's activities and interactions in the preschool classroom. The model is an effective mode for parents and educators to negotiate the construction of shared understandings through acknowledgment and acceptance of multiple perspectives and multiple ways of knowing.

The children attend a preschool program led by one teacher and one assistant. At the same time, the parents meet as a group with a facilitator and observe the children's program on closed-circuit television. The parents observe, record and discuss their children's interactions with materials, other children, and the teachers. Home experiences are also shared and related to the classroom situations.

